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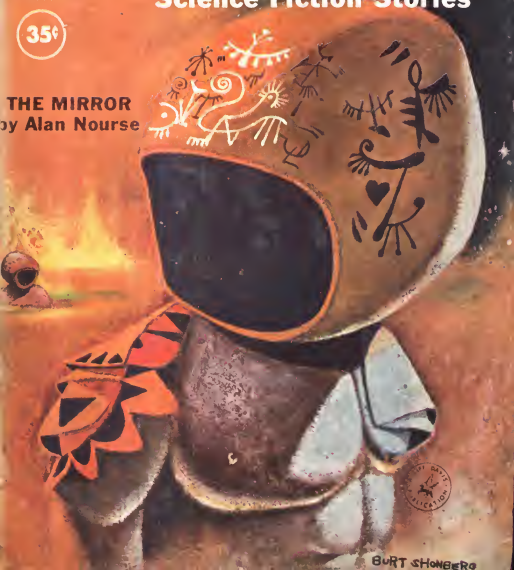
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by Alan Nourse



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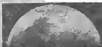
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NOVELETS

THE MIRROR

By Alan E. Nourse..... 7

NO END OF TIME

By Phyllis Gottlieb..... 104

SHORT STORIES

SIDE EFFECT

By Joseph D. Laven..... 38

OLAF STAPLEDON: COSMIC PHILOSOPHER (Article)

By Sam Moskowitz..... 51

THE FIFTIETH YEAR OF APRIL

By Arthur Porges..... 66

DRIVE OUT OF MIND

By Dan Morgan..... 72

DAVID'S DADDY

By Rosal George Brown..... 93

FEATURES

EDITORIAL..... 5

ACCORDING TO YOU . . . 127

COMING NEXT MONTH 71

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EDITORIAL



NO, WE are not turning into a horror publication.

The two sport-clothed gentlemen at the left are not really from another planet; it only seems that way to them, for they both must live in Los Angeles. In the glasses, and with a Western string tie dangling jauntily, is the Old Master, Bob Bloch; his conspirator in crime is Albert Nuetzell, cover artist extraor-

ordinary. And, if you can tear your eyes away from the handsome faces, they are gloating over an issue of *Fantastic* in which they collaborated on the cover story, "The Funnel of God."

For any of you who really care, the scene is the Los Angeles House of Mystery, otherwise known as Forrest Ackerman's Domain.

* * *

Did you think the Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God because they were wicked? Well, a Russian identified as a "physico-mathematician" is going to set you straight. He says the fire and brimstone that ruined the place was really the explosion of a nuclear fuel dump. He says the divine messengers who warned Lot and his family to get out of town before it was too late were crew members of a spaceship from another planet which had landed nearby. He says Lot's wife was not turned into a pillar of salt, but into a pillar of radioactive gunk. Proof? He says there's a big rock ledge near the site of ancient Sodom and Gomorrah that would have made a dandy landing-spot for a nuclear-powered spaceship.

So what else is new, Comrade?—NL

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FAN 6-0

Four enemy ships hidden on Saturn—and the only way to find out who they were, what they wanted, was to seek out the meaning of what was reflected in . . .

THE MIRROR

By ALAN E. NOURSE

ILLUSTRATED by GRAYAM

Somewhere down on the surface of Saturn the Enemy was waiting.

The Earth outpost on Saturn Satellite knew the Enemy was there, with his four great ships and the unimaginable power that had brought him from whatever place he had come. But the Earth outpost did not know why he had come, and they did not know what he intended to do.

He had come into the Solar System, and struck with pointless savagery, and then fled to a place where Earth ships could not follow him, and now he waited there. His very presence there was intolerable; the Earth outpost had to fight him, but the fight was on his terms, and it was on the battleground he had chosen.

THE waiting was the most terrible part of all, for Provost.

There was no chrono in the day room of the Satellite ship, but Provost had his own private chrono buried in his skull, somewhere in that vague, impersonal space that lay between his left ear and his left eyebrow, deep down, ticking away hours, minutes, seconds, ridiculous fractions of ridiculous segments of seconds, marking them off against him inexorably, the epitome of all timepieces. It was there in his head and he couldn't get away from it, not even when his shift was over and he was back in Relief, laboriously rebuilding the fragments of Ben Provost that the Enemy had torn away. Now, almost whole and

fresh again, he could hear the chrono clicking away against him, and he knew that he feared the waiting far more than he feared the Enemy.

Almost time, Provost. Almost your turn to go down again . . .

He paced the day room, and felt sweat trickle down his chest from the waiting and the silence. Always, in the last hour before his shift, he existed in a cloak of silence. Canned music blared from the wall speaker, unnaturally loud, but it was soundless to Provost. There was talking and chatter in the day room, harsh laughter all about him, noises of glasses clinking, feet shuffling. A dozen men were here, but to Provost the day room was like a view-screen with the sound turned off. He was utterly isolated.

He rubbed wet palms against his trousers and waited.

Nobody looked at him, of course. They knew that his shift was next. Nobody spoke to him; he might smile and answer, or he might turn savagely and break their necks at a single word. It had happened before. He was like a coiled spring waiting for the trigger, and nobody wanted to tamper with him twenty

minutes before shift change. They knew he couldn't be responsible for what he might do.

And with every passing second the spring wound tighter. That was what made the waiting so terrible.

He went below and stepped into a hot foam shower, felt the powerful muscles of his shoulders and neck relax a trifle. Briefly he thought of the Turner girl. Would she be in Relief when he came back again? She was skillful . . . more skillful than any of the others. And that new woman that DepPsych had sent out, Dorie Kendall . . . what about her? Help, or hindrance? Dangerous, sending out new people at a time like this. And yet, she'd *listened* when he'd told her how he could use his Analogue to go down onto Saturn's surface, yet never actually leave the Satellite ship at all. Maybe she'd do. Maybe she might even be able to help him, somehow . . .

He dressed quickly now as the fear grew stronger in his mind. There was no use trying to fight it down—he knew that from long experience. It was far more exhausting to try than to give in to it, start counting the minutes to Relief from *now* instead of when the shift be-

gan. It made things balance better in his mind that way, even if it made DepPsych scream and wring their hands. What did they know about this Idiot War that he didn't know? Nothing, exactly nothing. He was an expert on this war. They could never imagine what an expert he was.

He checked at the Control Board. "Provost on."

"Are you steady?" The voice from Control asked.

Provost grunted.

"All right, here's the report." The voice hesitated an instant. "I don't think you're going to like it very much."

"Let's have it."

"Dead quiet on the front all through the last shift," Control said.

Provost blinked. "Quiet!"

"That's what the man said."

"Oh, Lord. Now what?"

"I wish I could tell you." The voice from Control was puzzled and sympathetic. "They're brewing *something* down there, that's certain, and it's likely to be nasty. They haven't given us a quiet shift in months." Provost could almost see the face of the Controller, somewhere deep in the lower regions of the Satellite ship. "You may get it, Ben. But then, maybe it'll stay quiet for you, too."

"Fat chance," said Provost. "I'm going in now."

He stepped into the Analogue cubicle with the green flasher over the door, found the cockpit in the darkness, fit his damp hands into the grips. He shook the Analogue helmet down on his head until it was comfortable. He didn't try to tell himself that *he* wasn't really going down onto Saturn's surface, that only a tiny bit of metal and stamped circuitry was going down under his control . . . DepPsych had dropped that line of comfort long ago. Provost knew too well that he didn't have to be on the surface in the flesh for the Enemy to rip him apart. He closed his eyes in the darkness, trying to relax.

Still waiting, now, for the signal to move in. He didn't know which man he was relieving. DepPsych said it was better not to. Even the signals from the Analogues were monitored so he wouldn't have a hint. Every man operated his Analogue differently . . . but could the Enemy tell the difference?

Provost was certain that they could. Not that it seemed to make any difference, to them.

"Count down." He heard

the buzzer sound, and he crushed down with all his power on the hand grips. He felt the jolting thud as he slammed into full Analogue contact, and something deep in his mind began screaming *now! now! now!*

He dropped away into nothing.

He knew that he was on the surface, even though a corner of his mind was aware of the sticky hand grips, the dark closeness of the Analogue cubicle. Before him he could see great yawning chasms of ice stretching out into the distance. Yellow-gray light reflected down from the Rings. He could sense the devastating pressure of Saturn's atmosphere even though he could not feel it. Overhead, a roiling sea of methane and ammonia clouds, crashing lightning, the unspeakable violence of Saturn's continual war with itself.

And somewhere beyond the place where he was, the Enemy.

There was no contact, at first. He groped, and found nothing. He could always tell their presence, just as he was sure now that they could tell his. But that was as far as he could go. *They* planned. *They* moved. If *they* were ready,

they struck. If they weren't ready, they didn't.

And until they struck, he was helpless. There was nothing for him to fight against. All he could do was wait. For what? He did not know. But always before, there had been *something*.

Now, nothing. Not a whisper. He waited, sick with fear. He knew the brutality of the Enemy. He knew the viciousness of their blows, the savagery, the cunning. These were things he could fight, turning their own weapons against them. But *nothingness* was something else.

How could he fight nothing?

He stretched his mind, groping for them. Then, suddenly, he felt a gentle brush of contact . . . they were there, all right. Also waiting. But for what? His muscles knotted, cramped. *Why didn't they do something?* A quick, stabbing blow would be merciful relief . . . but it did not come.

The Enemy had never been merciful. There was something else they were going to do . . .

When it came, it was almost overpowering in its intensity. Not hostility, nor anger, nor hatred, as before.

Instead, incredibly, a soft gentle mist of supplication, a wave of reproach. *Why do you hate us when we want only peaceful contact with you? Why do you try to drive us back? We have come from so far, and now you try only to destroy us . . .*

It caught him off guard. He tried to formulate an answer, but they swept in swiftly, surrounded him with reproach. As always, he could not tell *how* this contact with the Enemy was made. He simply felt them, deep in his mind, and they were closer now, all about him, sucking him deep into their minds. He felt a glowing warmth there now that was utterly different from before. He felt himself drawn, moving slowly, then faster and faster, in tightening spirals toward the vortex as the Enemy's minds drew him in. *We want to stop this fighting, but you prolong it. Why? Why won't you give us a chance?*

And then he saw the physical images of the Enemy for the first time. They were approaching him on the surface. He couldn't see them clearly . . . only fuzzy outlines . . . but enough to see that they were humanoid, manlike. They moved toward him as he

watched. His heart roared with unexpected excitement. Could they mean it? Could they really want to reveal themselves, establish contact, put an end to this grueling, brutal Idiot War that had been going on for so long?

Something in his own mind caught him then, shrieking alarm. *Don't be a fool! They're treacherous, there's nothing they won't try. Don't let them poison you, fight back!*

He caught at the grips, trying to center his mind on the approaching emissaries, trying to catch the fringes of thought that lay beneath the surface, but the wave of reproachfulness came back at him with increasing intensity.

Why do you hate us so much?

He knew, coldly, what he had to do. It was the only thing to do, even though it seemed so horribly wrong.

He waited until the emissaries were close. Then he struck out at their minds, as viciously as he knew how. He drove the blow home with six long months of bitterness and hatred behind it, striking out wildly, slicing them down like wheat before a scythe. He felt them recoil and crumble, and pressed his advantage coldly, flailing at the insidious sup-

plicating pattern of thought surrounding him.

The spiral broke, suddenly, releasing him, but this time there was no stark, brutal core of malignancy that he had seen beneath their illusions so many times before. Instead, the vortex receded gently, regretfully . . . injured bewildered, helpless to understand.

Why? Why will you not even give us a chance? Why do you hate us so much?

It was harder to bear than naked savagery. Frantically Provost rang for Relief. It seemed, suddenly, as if every wrong and every imagined wrong he had ever done in his life was welling up to torment him; he knew it was only Enemy illusion, but his mind was screaming, twisting in on itself. The sense of guilt and self-loathing swept through him in waves as he fought to maintain the tiny thread of control. *Butcher!* his mind was screaming at him. *What if they were sincere? What if you were wrong?*

The Control Board jerked him back before he broke, snapped off his Analogue contact abruptly. He stood up in the darkness of the cubicle and disengaged his cramped hands from the grips. It was

over; he was safe. His Rehab conditioning cut in now to take over . . . now there would be Relief from the onslaught, quietness, gentleness, love, peace . . .

But the waves of guilt were still washing at his mind. He started walking down the corridor toward the Relief room as his hands began to tremble; then he broke into a run. He knew that only seconds now stood between him and sanity, and sanity lay at the end of the corridor . . .

The Turner girl was in the room waiting for him. There was soft music, gentle light. She sat across the room, and he rushed to her, buried his face in her lap, felt her fingers stroking his forehead as he let himself go completely, let great sobs of relief erupt from his throat and shake his shoulders.

She was silent for a long time, stroking his forehead. Then she stopped stroking. She leaned forward, bent her lips to his ear.

"Butcher!" she whispered.

Only a whisper, but virulent, malignant. "Traitor! You call yourself human, but you go down there to butcher them! *Monster!*"

Provost screamed, then threw himself back against



the wall, arms out, clawing at it, screaming as he stared at her. She faced him, and spit at him, and laughed as his screams rose from torment to agony.

An alarm bell was clanging now; her lips twisted. She threw open the corridor door. "*Butcher!*" she hurled back at him, and broke for the door.

Gunfire rattled from both ends of the corridor. The crossfire caught her, lifted her off her feet and dropped her in a crumpled heap on the metal floor plates.

Provost huddled in the corner of the room, babbling.

The enormity of the blow did not register immediately. Like any warfare operation, the Satellite Ship was geared to face emergencies; the sheer momentum of its battle station procedure delayed the impact for hours. Then, slowly, the entire operation of the Satellite Ship began to freeze in its tracks.

What had happened was no ordinary emergency.

To Dorie Kendall the full, terrifying implication was clear from the start. She had long months of DepPsych training behind her, days and nights of tape-study and hypno sleep on the passage out from Earth. She had never

contacted the Enemy, but she knew a great deal about the Enemy and what the Enemy might do. The instant Dr. Coindreau had called her down to the autopsy, she realized what had happened.

Only now it was dawning on her in a cold wash of horror that it was her fault that it had happened at all.

"But why don't you *attack* them?" she had asked Provost a few hours before his shift began. "Why do you always take the defensive?"

Provost had looked at her, patiently, as though she were a child who didn't quite understand the facts of life. "They're perceptive," he said. "They're powerful. Incredibly powerful."

"All the more reason to hit them hard," she had argued. "Hit them with a blow that will drive them back reeling."

Provost smiled. "Is that the new DepPsych theory?"

"*Something* has to be changed. This war has gone on and on."

"Maybe after a while you'll understand," he had said slowly. "How can we hit them this powerful blow when they're busy driving mental javelins into us with all the force they can muster? I can try . . . but I don't know."

He had tried, the girl re-

flected, and now bare hours later he was strapped down screaming and shattered in the isolation cubicle, and the Relief girl . . .

She watched Dr. Coindreau's lean masked face and careful fingers as he worked at the autopsy table. Every room in Medical Section, every fixture, had a double use. Sickbay and Rehab quarters. Office and lab. Examining room doubling as surgery. Now it was doubling as morgue. She peered down at the remains of the Turner girl in growing anger and revulsion and wondered, desperately, how the Enemy had done it.

She realized, coldly, that it was up to her to find out how, and fast.

The Enemy had poisoned the Turner girl, somehow. They had reached into the heart of the Satellite Ship and struck at the most critical link in the chain . . . the Relief program that could send the men back into battle.

Without Relief, there could be no men to fight . . .

But why did we have to murder her? The Kendall girl thought bitterly. If we could have studied her, we might have learned how the Enemy had done it.

The blinker over the door flashed, and a big heavy-set man stepped into the room. She recognized Vanaman, commander of the Satellite Ship. She had talked to him briefly before; it had been an unpleasant interview. Vanaman had made it quite clear that he could not understand why DepPsych insisted upon sending women out to Saturn Satellite, nor why Earth Control chose *now* of all times to shift gears and saddle him with Dorie Kendall. Now the big man glared at her and stared down at the thing on the table.

"The Turner girl?" he asked.

"What's left of her," Dr. Coindreau said. "I'm about finished. It's not going to help us any."

"It's got to help us." Vanaman's voice was harsh.

Dorie Kendall looked up at him sharply. "You didn't leave us much to work with, you know."

Vanaman's fist clenched on the table. Deep-cut lines sliced from his nose down to the corners of his mouth. His face showed the grueling pressure of months of Command, and he seemed to control himself with difficulty. "What did you expect me to do," he said, "kiss her?"

The girl flushed. "You didn't have to kill her."

Vanaman blinked at her. "You've been helping the doctor do the post?"

"Certainly."

"And you've run a standard post-mortem brain wash?" He nodded toward the neuro-molecular analyzer clicking in the wall, the great grandfather of all Analogues.

"Of course."

"And what did you find, Miss Kendall?"

"Nothing intelligible," she said defiantly. "The Enemy had her, that's all."

"Fine," said Vanaman. "And you're suggesting that we should have had *that* running around *alive* on this ship? Even for ten seconds? We know they had her tongue . . . they must have had her eyes also, her ears, her reason." He shook his head. "Everything we've done against the Enemy has depended on keeping them *away* from us, *off* this ship. That's why we monitor every move of every man and woman here, Miss Kendall, including yourself. That's why we have guns in every corridor and room. That's why we used them on the Turner girl."

There was silence for a moment. Then the doctor pushed back from the table

and looked up. "You used them too late on the Turner girl," he said to Vanaman.

"You mean Provost is dead?"

"Oh, no." The doctor jerked off his mask, ran a lean hand through his hair. "He's alive enough. That is to say, his heart is beating. He breathes. Just what is going on above his tentorium is something else again. I doubt if even Miss Kendall can tell you that. I certainly can't."

"Then he's a total loss." Vanaman's face seemed to sag, and Dorie realized suddenly how heavily he had been hanging on that thread of hope.

"Who can say?" the doctor said. "You take a chunk of fine granite and strike precisely the right blow, precisely hard enough at precisely the right angle, and it will shatter into a dozen pieces. That is what has happened to Provost. Any salvage will be strictly up to DepPsych. It's out of my province." The physician's dark eyes met Dorie's for a moment, and shifted away. "Unfortunately, the significance of this attack is greater than the survival or loss of Ben Provost. I think we'd better all face that right now. The job the Enemy has

done on Provost was a precision job. It can mean only one thing: that somehow they have managed to acquire a very complex understanding of human behavior patterns. Am I right, Dorie?"

She nodded. "It isn't what they did to Provost that matters," she said. "It's *how* they did it."

"Then how did they do it?" Vanaman asked, turning on her. "That's what you're here for, isn't it? It's DepPsych's job to tell us how to fight this Enemy . . . why don't you know?"

"I need time," she said. "I don't have an answer . . ."

The big man leaned forward, his lips tight across his teeth. "You've *got* to give me an answer," he said. "We can't afford time, can't you see that? This Satellite is the only shield between Earth and the Enemy. If you can't give us the answer, we're through, washed up. We've got to know how they did what they did to Provost."

Through the viewport the pale, yellow globe of Saturn stared up at them, unwinking, like the pale eye of a venomous snake.

"I wish I could tell you," Dorie Kendall said. "The Turner girl can't tell us. Neither can Provost. But

maybe there is one way we can learn."

"And that?"

"Provost's Analogue. It has been the *real* contact with the Enemy. It should know everything Provost knows about them. The Analogue may give us the answer."

She fed the tapes from Ben Provost's Analogue into the playback unit in the tiny projection room in Integration Section, and for a few moments ceased to be Dorie Kendall of DepPsych, trained for duty and stationed on Saturn Satellite, and became Ben Provost instead.

It was an eerie experience. She realized that every Analogue was different, a faithful impression of the mind of its prototype; she had not been prepared for the sudden, abrupt contact with the prototype mind of Ben Provost.

She felt the sickening thud of his contact with the Analogue just prior to its last descent to the surface. She felt the overwhelming wave of tension and fear that the Analogue had recorded; then the sudden, irrational, almost gleeful sense of elation as Ben Provost's eyes and ears and mind floated down to the place where the Enemy was. The Analogue tape was faithful to

a high degree of fidelity. Dorie Kendall gripped the chair arms until her wrists cramped.

It was like going to the surface herself.

Beside her she felt Vanaman's huge body growing tense as he gnawed his knuckles, soaking in the tape record. She felt the growing tension, the snowballing sense of impending disaster reflecting from Ben Provost's mind. . . .

And then she lost contact with the things around her and fell completely into Provost's role. The growing supplication of the Enemy surrounded her. She felt the sense of reproach, the helpless appeal of the illusion, and Provost's response, calculated to perfection and deployed like a pawn on a chess board. *It's a trick, a pitfall, watch out! Don't be fooled, don't fall into their trap. . . .*

She felt the wild fury of Provost's mind as he hurled the illusion aside, struck out at the Enemy as she had told him to do. And then the receding waves of supplication and reproach from the Enemy, the overwhelming, demoralizing wave of guilt.

In that moment she began to understand Ben Provost, and to realize what the En-

emy had done. Her face was pale when the tape stopped. She clenched her fists to keep her hands from trembling.

Vanaman leaned back, defeat heavy on his face. "Nothing," he said. "It's always the same. We have nothing."

"I didn't realize what they could do," Dorie said.

"But that was on the surface. Down there we could fight it, control it. Now they've reached us here, too." He stood up and started for the corridor. "For all we know, they've been here all along, just playing with us. We can't really be certain that they haven't. Do you see what we've been fighting, now? We don't know *anything* about them, or be sure we're fighting a war with them."

Dorie Kendall looked up, startled. "Is there any doubt of that?"

"There's plenty of doubt," Vanaman said. "We *seem* to be fighting a war, except that nobody seems to understand just what kind of war we're fighting, or just why we're fighting it . . ." His voice trailed off and he shrugged wearily. "Well, we're against the wall now. Provost was our best Analogue man. He depended utterly on Relief to put him back together again

after one of those sessions down there. The Turner girl was the whole key to our fighting technique, and they got to her, somehow, and poisoned her. If they can do that, we're through."

The girl stared at him. "You mean we should quit? Withdraw?"

Vanaman's voice was bitter. "What else can we do? Any one of the girls in Relief could be just the same as the Turner girl, right now. Our entire strategy has been cracked open in one blow. The Relief program is ruined, and without Relief I can't send another man down there."

"But you've *got* to," Dorie said. "We can't stop now."

"We can't fight them, either. We've been fighting them for months, and we know nothing about them. They come from . . . somewhere. We don't know where, or when, or how. All we know is what they did to Titan Colony."

"We're trying to defend ourselves against an imponderable, and our defenses are crumbling." Vanaman closed the tape cans and tossed them into the return file with an air of finality. "Do you know what Provost called this war?"

Dorie Kendall nodded. "He told me. An Idiot War."

"And he was right. *Their* war, not ours. What do they want? We don't know. On *their* choice of battlefield, in *their* kind of warfare, they're whipping us, and we don't even know how. If we had even a glimpse of what they were trying to do, we might be able to fight them. Without that, we're helpless."

She heard what he was saying, and she realized that it was almost true, and yet something stuck in her mind, a flicker of an idea. "I wonder," she said. "Maybe we don't know what the Enemy is trying to do here . . . but there's one possibility nobody seems to have considered."

Vanaman looked up slowly. "Possibility?"

"That *they* don't know what they're trying to do, either," Dorie Kendall said.

It *was* a possibility, even Vanaman grudgingly admitted that. But as she went down to Isolation Section to examine Ben Provost, Dorie Kendall knew that it made no sense . . . no more, nor less, than anything else that the Enemy had done since they had come six months before into Earth's solar system.

They had come silent as death, unheralded: four great

ships moving as one, slipping in from the depths of space beyond Pluto. How long they had been lurking there, unobserved but observing, no one could say. They moved in slowly, like shadows crossing a valley, with all space to conceal them, intruders in the enormous silence.

An observation post on tiny Miranda of Uranus spotted them first, suddenly and incredibly present where no ships ought to be, in a formation that no Earth ships ever would assume. Instrument readings were confirmed, doubted, reconfirmed. The sighting was relayed to the supply colony on Callisto, and thence to Earth.

Return orders were swift: keep silence, observe, triangulate and track, compute course and speed, make no attempt at contact. But return orders were too late. The observation post on Miranda had ceased, abruptly, to exist.

Alerted Patrol ships searched in vain, until the four strange ships revealed themselves in orbit around Saturn. Deliberately? No one knew. Their engines were silent; they drifted like huge encapsulated spores, joining the other silent moons around the sixth planet. They orbited

for months. Titan Colony watched them, Ganymede watched them, Callisto watched them.

Nothing happened.

On Earth there were councils, debate, uncertainty; speculation, caution, fear. Wait for them to make contact. Give them time. Wait and see. But the four great ships made no move. They gave no sign of life. Nothing.

Signals were dispatched, with no response. Earth prepared against an attack—a ridiculous move; who could predict the nature of any attack that might come? Still, Earthmen had always been poor at waiting. Curiosity battled caution and won, hands down. What were these ships? Where did they come from? Hostile or friendly? Why had they come here?

Above all, *what did they want?*

No answers came from the four great ships. Nothing.

Finally an Earth ship went up from Titan Colony, moving out toward the orbit of the intruders. The crew of the contact ship knew their danger. They had a single order: make contact. Use any means, accept any risk, but make contact. Approach with caution, with care, gently, with-

out alarming, but make contact. At any cost.

They approached the intruders, and were torn from space in one instantaneous flash of white light. Simultaneously, Titan Colony flared like an interplanetary beacon and flickered out, a smoking crater three hundred miles wide and seventy miles deep.

And then, incredibly, the four great ships broke from orbit and fled deep beneath the methane and ammonia clouds of Saturn's surface. Earth reeled from the blow, and waited paralyzed for the next . . . and nothing happened. No signal, no sign, nothing.

But now the intruders were the Enemy. The war had begun, if it was a war; but it was not a war that Earthmen knew how to fight. A war of contradiction and wild illogic. A war fought in a ridiculous microcosm where Earthmen could not fight, with weapons that Earthmen did not comprehend.

An Idiot War . . .

She went to see Ben Provost just eight hours after the Enemy had struck through the Turner girl.

As she followed the tall, narrow-shouldered doctor into the isolation cubicles of

Medical Section he stopped and turned to face her. "I don't think this is wise at all."

"Maybe not," the girl said. "But I have no choice. Provost was closer to the Enemy than anyone else here. There's no other place to start."

"What do you think you're going to learn?" Dr. Coin-dreau asked.

"I don't know. Only Provost knows exactly what happened in the Relief room."

"We know what happened," the doctor protested. "The Relief room was monitored. Provost had come close to his breakpoint when Control jerked his Analogue back from the surface. The pressure on the men under battle conditions is almost intolerable. They all approach breakpoint, and induced regression in the Relief room is the fastest, safest way to unwind them, as long as we don't let them curl up into a ball."

"You mean it was the fastest and safest way until now," Dorie corrected him.

The doctor shrugged. "They hit Provost at his weakest. The Turner girl couldn't have done worse with a butcher knife. I still don't see what you're going to learn from Provost."

"At least I can see what they've done to him." She looked at the doctor. "I don't see how my seeing him can hurt him."

"Oh, I'm not worried about him." The doctor opened the door. At the nursing desk a corpsman was punching chart-cards. "How's he doing?" the doctor asked.

"Same as before." The corpsman saw the girl, and flushed. "Doc, are you taking her in there?"

"That's what she wants."

Inside the cubicle they found Provost lying on his back on a bunk. The pale blue aura of a tangle screen hovered over him, gentle restraint, but effective.

Provost was singing.

The words drifted across the room, and Dorie suddenly caught them, and she, too, felt her cheeks turn red.

"Hello, Ben," the doctor said. "How are you feeling?"

Provost stopped singing and smiled. "Fine. Yourself?"

"This is Miss Kendall. She's going to help take care of you."

"Well, it's about time." Provost turned his face toward Dorie. No sign of personal interest, but she felt suddenly as though all of her clothes were off. His eyes were flat,

a snake's eyes, but eager. Very eager. "Not much to offer, I'd say. Is she cooperative?"

The tone of his voice made her flush deepen. She shivered. Dr. Coindreau said, "Ben, do you know where you are?"

"The best place ever," said Provost, grinning at Dorie. "In bed."

"Do you know where?"

Provost ignored the question. He stared fixedly at the girl. "Do I pay now, or when I'm through?" he asked, disinterestedly.

"Do you know what happened to you, Ben?"

His eyes didn't waver, but he frowned. "Memory's a little sticky. She ought to jog it up for me a little." She saw his hand clench on the coverlet until the knuckles whitened. "She's a little flat-chested, but she'll do, all right."

The doctor sighed. "Listen to me, Ben. You were on the surface. Something happened down there. What . . ."

Provost obviously was not listening. "Look, Doc, you're just in the way," he cut in urgently, staring at Dorie. "There's damned little privacy around here as it is."

"All right, Ben." Dr. Coindreau turned away. He led the girl back into the corridor.

She was no longer blushing. She was white as a sheet. "You know that he'd kill you before he finished," the doctor said to her gently.

She nodded, "I know. It's horrible."

"At least the mechanism is direct enough. Fairly primitive, too. An ordinary man would either be dead or catatonic. Provost is a rock of stability in comparison."

She nodded. "But he's turned his hatred on the girl, not on the Enemy."

"It was the girl who hit him, remember?" They stepped into an office, and she took the seat the doctor offered gratefully. "Anyway," he said, "Provost never actually contacted the Enemy. We speak as though he had actually been down on the surface physically, and of course he hasn't. You know how an Analogue works?"

"I ought to—I have one—but I only know the general theory, not the details."

"Nobody knows the details too well. Nobody really could . . . an Analogue is at least quasi-sentient, and the relationship between an Analogue and its operator is extremely individual and personal. That's precisely why Analogues are the only real weap-

ons we have to use against the Enemy."

"I can't quite see that," Dorie said.

"Look . . . these creatures, whatever they are, buried themselves on the surface of Saturn and just sat there, right? The blows they struck against Titan Colony and the contact ship showed us the kind of power they *could* bring to bear . . . but they didn't follow up. They struck and ran. Pretty pointless, wouldn't you say?"

It seemed so, at first glance. Dorie Kendall frowned. "Maybe not so pointless. It made counterattack almost impossible."

Dr. Coindreau nodded grimly. "Exactly the point. We didn't know what—or how—to counterattack. We practically *had* to do *something*, and yet there was nothing we could do."

"Why didn't we land and hunt them out?" the girl asked. "We can get down there, can't we?"

"Yes, but it would have been worse than useless. It would have taken all our strength and technology just to survive, let alone do anything else. So we used Analogues, just the way Golden and his crew used them to explore the surface of Jupiter.

The Analogues were originally developed to treat paranoids, of course. The old lysergic acid poisons proved that a personality could dissociate voluntarily and reintegrate again, so that a psych man could slip right into a paranoid fantasy with his patient and work him on his own ground. Trouble was that unstable personalities didn't reintegrate again so well, which was why so many psych-docs blew up in all directions on LSD." Dr. Coin-dreau paused, chewing his lip. "With Analogues, the dissociation is only apparent, not real. A carbon-copy, with all the sensory, motor, and personality factors outlined perfectly. The jump from enzyme-antagonists to electronic punched-molecule impressions isn't too steep, really, and at least the Analogues are predictable."

It cleared up many questions that had been in Dorie Kendall's mind. "So the operatives—like Provost—could send their Analogues down and explore in absentia, so to speak."

"As a probe, in hope of making contact with the Enemy. It turned out differently, though. That was what the Enemy seemed to be waiting for. They drove back the

first probers with perfectly staggering brutality. We struck back at them, and they returned with worse. So pretty soon we were dancing this silly gavotte with them down there, except that the operatives didn't find it so silly. Maybe those medieval Earth wars seemed silly, with the battleground announced in advance, the forces lined up, the bugles blowing, parry and thrust and everybody quits at sunset . . . but lots of men got killed that way just the same." He paused for a moment, abstracted; and then went on with sudden firmness: "There was no sense to this thing, but it was what the Enemy seemed to want. Our best men have thrown everything they could into it, and only their conditioning and the Relief room has kept them going."

He shot a glance toward the cubicle. "Well, now that's all over. They've shifted the battle scene on us, and we're paralyzed."

For a long moment the DepPsych girl sat in silence. Then she said, "I don't think 'paralyzed' is exactly the word you want. You mean 'panicked'."

"Does it make any difference?"

"Maybe a world of difference," the girl said thoughtfully, "*to the Aliens.*"

Paralysis or panic, the effect on the Satellite Ship was devastating.

Twelve hours after Provost was dragged kicking and screaming out of the Relief room, the ship's crew waited in momentary anticipation, braced against the next blow. They could not guess from where it might come, nor what it might do. They could only sit in agony and wait.

Twenty-four hours later, they still waited. Thirty-six hours, and they still waited. Activity was suspended, even breathing was painful. In the day-room the Analogue operatives gnawed their knuckles, silent and fearful, unwilling to trust even a brief exchange of words. They were Earthmen, the girl realized, and Earthmen were old hands at warfare. They understood too well the horrible power of advantage. Earthly empires had tottered and fallen for the loss of one tiny advantage.

But the Enemy's advantage was not tiny. It was huge, overpowering. They waited for the blow to fall. It had to fall, if there was order and logic in the universe . . .

It didn't fall. They waited, and far worse than a brutal, concerted attack against them, nothing happened. Nothing at all.

The paralysis deepened. The Enemy had reached a girl within the Satellite and turned her into a murderous blade in their midst. Who could say who else they had reached? No one knew. There was nothing to grasp, nothing to hold on to, nothing . . .

Dorie Kendall did not elaborate on her remark to Dr. Coindreau, but something had slid smoothly into place in her mind as she had talked to him, and she watched the Satellite and its men around her grinding to a halt with a new alertness.

The attack on Provost through the Turner girl was not pointless, she was certain of that. It had purpose. Nor was it an end in itself . . . it was only the beginning. To understand the purpose it was necessary to somehow begin to understand the Enemy.

And that, of course, was the whole war. That was what the Enemy had so consistently fought to prevent. *They have built up an impenetrable wall, a blinding smokescreen to hide themselves*, she thought, *but there*

must be a way to see them clearly . . .

The only way to see them was through Provost. As she saw him again and again, trying to break through his violent obsession, she became more and more certain that Ben Provost was the key. They were brutal interviews, fruitless . . . but she watched as she worked.

Vanaman found her in Medical Section the third day . . . a red-eyed, bitter Vanaman, obviously exhausted, obviously fighting for the last vestige of control, obviously helpless to thwart the creeping paralysis in the ship under his command. "You've got to hit Eberle with something," he said harshly. "I can't make him budge."

"Who is Eberle?" the girl wanted to know.

"The Analogue dispatcher. He won't send an Analogue down."

She found John Eberle in the Analogue banks, working by himself, quietly and efficiently and foolishly, testing wires, testing transmission, dismantling the delicate electronic units and reassembling them in an atmosphere of chaos around him. The operative cubicles were all

empty, the doors hanging open, alarm signals winking unheeded.

"What are you doing with them?" Dorie asked him, staring down at the dismantled Analogues.

Eberle grinned up at her foolishly. "Testing them," he said. "Just testing."

"But we need them down on the surface *now*. Can't you see that?"

Eberle's smile faded. "I can't send them down there."

"Why not?"

"Who's going to operate them?" the dispatcher said. "What will the operators do for Relief?" His eyes narrowed. "Would *you* want to take one down?"

"I'm not trained to take one down. But there are operators here who are."

Eberle shrugged, his shoulders. "Well, you're DepPsych, maybe you've got some magic formula to make them go down. I haven't. I've already tried it."

She stared at him, and felt the wave of helplessness sweep over her. It was as though she was standing in an enormous tangle-field, and all her efforts to free herself only settled it more firmly on her shoulders. She knew it wasn't anything as simple as fear or cowardice that was

paralyzing the ship this way.

It was more than that, something far deeper and more basic.

Once again she was forced back to where it had all started, the only possible channel of attack.

Ben Provost. She headed for the isolation cubicle.

Thirty-six hours, and she had barely slept; when exhaustion demanded rest, her mind would not permit it, and she would toss in darkness, groping for land, for something solid to grasp and cling to.

Provost sucked up most of her time . . . wasted hours, hours that drained her physically and emotionally. She made no progress, found no chink in the brutal armor. When she was not with him she was in the projection booth, studying the Analogue tapes stored and filed from the beginning, studying the monitor tapes, watching and listening, trying somehow to build a composite picture of the Enemy that had lurked and then struck. There were too many pictures, that was the trouble. None of them fit. None corresponded to the others. She was trying to make sense from nonsense, and always the task seemed more hopeless than before.

And yet, slowly, a pattern began to emerge.

An alien creature, coming by intent or accident into a star system with intelligent life, advanced technology. The odds were astronomical against its ever happening. Perhaps a truly unique occurrence; certainly unique for the alien creatures . . .

What then?

A pattern that was inevitable . . .

She answered a violent summons from Vanaman, and he demanded progress with Ben Provost, and she told him there was no progress. He paced the floor, lashing out at her with all the fury that had been building up as the hours had passed. "That's what you're here for," he told her harshly. "That's why we have DepPsych—to deal with emergencies. We've got to have progress with that man."

Dorie sighed. "I'm doing everything I can," she said. "He has a powerful mind. He has it focussed down on one tiny pinpoint of awareness, and he won't budge it from there."

"He won't!" Vanaman roared. "What about *you*? You people have techniques. Use every method available.

You can break him away from it."

"Do you want him dead?" she asked him. "That's what you'll get if I drive him too hard. He's clinging for his life, and I mean that literally. To him, I am the Turner girl, and all that is sustaining him is this vicious drive to destroy me, as quickly as he can, as horribly as he can. You can use your imagination, I think."

Vanaman stared at her. She met his haggard eyes defiantly. Vanaman broke first. It was almost pitiable, the change that took place in him. He seemed to age before her eyes; the creases in his face seemed to harden and deepen, and his heavy hands—threatening weapons before—fell limp. Like a spirited dog that had been whipped and broken by a brutal master, he crumbled. "All right. I can't fight you." He spread his hands helplessly. "You know that I'm beaten, don't you? I'm cornered, and there's no place to turn. I know why Provost dreaded those long waits between shifts now. That's all I can do—wait for the blow to fall."

"What blow?" said the girl.

"Maybe you can tell me."

A strangled sound came from Vanaman's throat. "Everything we've done against them has been useless. Our attempt to contact them, our probing for them and fighting them on the surface—useless. When they got ready to hit us here, they hit us. All our precautions and defenses didn't hinder them." He glared at her. "All right, you tell me. What is it we're waiting for? Where is the blow going to come from?"

"I don't think there's going to be any blow," said Dorie Kendall.

"Then you're either blind or stupid," Vanaman snapped. "They've driven a gaping hole in our defenses. They know that. Do you think they're just going to let the advantage slide?"

"They might not, if they were human. But they're not. You seem to keep forgetting that."

Words died on his lips. He blinked and frowned. "I don't follow you," he said after a moment.

"Everything they've done fits a pattern," she said. "They have physical destructive power, but the only times they've used it was to prevent physical contact. After they struck did they press for-

ward? Humans might have, but they didn't. Instead, they moved back to the least accessible geographical region they could find in the solar system, a planetary surface we could not negotiate, and waited. When we sent down Analogue probes, they fought us, in a way—but what has made that fight so difficult? Can you tell me?"

"The fact that we didn't know what we were fighting," Vanaman said slowly. "The Analogue operatives didn't know what was coming next, never two attacks the same."

"Exactly," said the girl. "They knocked us off balance and kept us there. They didn't use their advantage then. Everything was kept tightly localized—until the Analogue operatives began to get their feet on the ground. You saw the same tapes I did. Those men were beginning to know what they were doing down there; they knew they could count on their conditioning and the Relief rooms to keep them from breaking, no matter how powerful the onslaught. So now, *only now*, the Enemy has torn that to ribbons with the Turner girl." She smiled. "You see what I mean about a pattern?"

"Maybe so," Vanaman conceded, "but I don't see why."

"Look—when you poke a turtle with a stick, what happens? He pulls in his head and sits there. Just that one little aggressive act on your part gives you a world of information about how turtles behave. You could write a book about turtles, right there. But suppose it happened to be a snapping turtle you poked, and he took the end of the stick off. You wouldn't need to poke him a second time to guess what he would do, would you? You already know. Why bother with a second poke?"

"Then you're saying that the Enemy won't strike again because they have what they want," said Vanaman.

"Of course," the girl said bleakly. "They have Provost. Through Provost they have every mind on this Satellite. They don't need to fight on the surface any more, they're right here."

Vanaman's eyes were hard as he rose from his seat. "Well, we can stop that. We can kill Provost."

She caught his arm as he reached for the intercom switch. "Well, well—you are panicky," she said tightly. "What do you think you're go-

ing to do when you've killed him?"

"I don't know," he snarled. "But I'll do something. I've got to get them into the open, out where I can see them, before we all split open at the seams . . ."

"You mean find out whether they have green skins and five legs or not? Who cares? She twisted his arm with amazing strength, threw him back into the seat. "Listen to me. What we have to know is what they want, how they think, how they behave. Physical contact with them is pointless until we know those things—can't you see that? *They've realized that from the start.*"

He stared at her. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to find out the things we have to know," she said. "I'm going to use the one real weapon we've got—Ben Provost—and I'm going to see that he's kept alive. Give me your arm."

Puzzled, he held it out. The needle bit so quickly he could not pull back. Realization dawned on his face.

"Sorry," she said gently. "There's only one thing to do, and killing Provost isn't it." She pushed him back in the seat like a sack of flour. "I wish it were," she added

softly, but Vanaman wasn't listening any more.

As she moved down the corridor the magnitude of what she was doing caught her and shook her violently. Things had crystalized in her mind just before she had gone to talk with Vanaman. A course had appeared which she only grasped in outline, and she had moved too fast, too concisely. Now she had tripped the switch. The juggernaut was moving in on her now, ponderously, but gaining momentum.

There would be no stopping it, she knew, no turning it back. A course of action, once initiated, developed power of its own. She was committed . . .

Earth was committed . . .

But now she was too terrified to think about that aspect of it. Her mind was filled and frozen by the ordeal she knew was facing her now: Ben Provost.

She knew she had to take Provost back from them, wrench him out of their grasp. She remembered the hard, flat look in his eyes when he watched her, and she shuddered.

There was a way to do it.

All around her she could feel the tension of the Satel-

lite ship, waiting helplessly, poised for demolition. She ran down the empty corridors, penetrating the depths of the ship, until she found the place she was seeking. Once inside Atmosphere Control Section she leaned against the wall, panting. But only for a moment.

Then she slipped the filters into her nostrils, and broke the tiny capsules, feeding them into the ventilation ducts of the ship.

She would take Provost back from the Enemy; then, if she survived—what? There were only hazy outlines in her mind. She knew the limitation of thought that was blocking her. It was the limitation that was utterly unavoidable in thinking of an alien, a creature not of Earth, not human. The limitation was so terribly easy to overlook until the alien was there facing her: the simple fact that she was bound and strapped by a human mind. She could only think human thoughts, in human ways. She could only comprehend the alien insofar as it bore human qualities, not an inch further. There was no way she could stretch her mind to cope with alien-ness. But worse—it inevitably assumed

a human mind on the part of the alien.

Which the Enemy did not have. What kind of a mind the Enemy did have she could not know, but it was not a human mind. Yet that alien mind *had* to be contacted and understood.

It had seemed impossible until she had realized that the Enemy had faced exactly the same problem, and solved it.

To the Enemy, stumbling upon intelligent life in Earth's solar system, a human mind was as incomprehensible as an alien mind was to a human. *They* had faced the same dilemma, and found a way to cope with it. *But how had they done it?* The very pattern of their approach showed how. It was data, and Dorie Kendall had treated it as data, and found the answer.

It revealed them.

They tried so hard to remain obscure while they studied us, she thought as she moved back toward the Analogue Section, *and yet with every move they made they revealed themselves to us further, if we had only had the wit to look. Everything they did was a revelation of themselves. They thought they were peering at us through a one-way portal, seeing us*

and yet remaining unseen—while in reality the glass was a mirror, reflecting their own natures in every move they made. They discovered our vulnerability, and at the same time helplessly revealed their own . . .

The ventilators hummed. She felt the tension in the ship relaxing as the poison seeped down the corridors. Muscles uncoiled. Fear dissolved from frightened minds. Doors banged open; there was talking, laughter, then lethargy, dullness, glazed eyes, yawns, slack mouths—

Sleep. Like Vanaman, slumped back in his chair, the Satellite slept. Operatives fell forward on their faces. The girls in the Relief rooms yawned, dozed, snored, slept.

It seemed to her that she could sense Provost's thoughts twisting out toward her in a tight, malignant channel, driving to destroy her, seeking release from the dreadful hatred the aliens were using to bind him. But then even Provost dozed and slept.

She was alone on the ship, a ghost. In the Analogue bank she activated the circuits she needed, set the dials, rechecked each setting to

make certain that she had made no error.

She dared not make an error now.

Finally, she went to Provost. She dragged his drugged body into the Analogue cubicle and strapped him down. She fit his hands into the grips. Another needle, then, swiftly, and his eyes blinked open.

He saw her and lunged for her with no warning sound. His arms tore at the restraints, jerking murderously. She jumped back from him, forcing out a twisted smile. She reached out mockingly to stroke his forehead, and he tried to bite her hand.

"Butcher!" she whispered. "Monster!"

Pure hate poured from his mouth as she laughed at him. Then she threw the Analogue switch. He jerked back as contact was made, and she moved swiftly into the adjacent cubicle, threw another switch, felt in her own mind the sickening thud of Analogue contact.

Her Analogue. A therapeutic tool before, now a deadly weapon in frightened, unsteady hands.

She was afraid. It seemed that she was watching images on a hazy screen. She saw Provost there, facing her,

hating her—yet she was sitting alone in darkness, and knew that he also was sitting in darkness. Then gradually the darkness seemed unreal; the Analogue images became sharp and clear.

Provost was moving in on her slowly, his mouth twisting, great knots of muscle standing out in his arms. He stood poised for a moment; then she screamed and broke down the corridor. He was after her like a cat. He leaped, struck her legs, threw her down on the metal floor and fell on her. She saw his arm upraised, felt the fist crash into her neck, again and again and again. Broken flesh, broken bones, paste, pulp, again and again . . .

She closed her eyes, her control reeling. There would be no Relief for her later. She fought him, then abandoned fighting and just clung, waiting for the end.

Abruptly, he was gone. She had felt his release as his hatred had burned itself out on her. He had stopped, and stood still, suddenly mild, puzzled, tired, wondering as he looked down at the thing on the floor. And then . . .

She knew he had started for the surface.

To Provost it was like

awakening from warm and peaceful sleep into terror.

He was horrified and appalled that he had been sleeping. Frantically he seized the hand grips, drove his Analogue down toward the surface. In his mind were fragments of memory. Something hideous had happened, long, long ago, something in the Relief room, and then time after time the Turner girl had come back to him in the isolation cubicle—or *had* it been the Turner girl?—and then just now he had found her and the hideous thing had been repeated.

And the horrible, abrupt awakening to the fact that the Satellite ship was utterly helpless and undefended from the Enemy.

How long had he slept? What had happened? Didn't they realize that every passing second might be precious to the Enemy, fatal to the Satellite?

He felt someone following him, screaming out at him in alarm. Not the Turner girl, as he had thought—Dorie Kendall, the DepPsych girl, surfacing her own Analogue—

Provost hesitated, fighting the sense of urgency in his mind. "Don't stop me, I've got to get down there.

There's no one covering . . ."

"You can't go down," she cried. "You have no support here. No conditioning, no Relief. We've got to do something very different."

"Different?" He felt her very close to him now and he paused in confusion. What did she know about the Enemy? "What's happening here? The Enemy is down there—why have we stopped fighting?"

Then she was telling him, frantically, as he groped out of confusion and tried to understand. "They had to know if we had a vulnerability—*any* vulnerability. Something they could use against us to protect themselves if they had to. They knew they could never risk direct contact with us until they knew that we were vulnerable in some way."

Provost shook his head, confused. "But why not?"

"Suppose we were hostile," she said, "and invulnerable. We might not stop at destroying their ships . . . we might follow them home and destroy them there. They couldn't know. They had to find a vulnerability to use as a weapon before any contact was possible—so they drew us out, prodded us, observed us, trying to find our limitations.

And they discovered our vulnerability—*panic*. A weakness in our natures, the point where intelligence deserts us and renders us helpless to fight any more. This is what they could use to control us, except that they must have the same vulnerability!"

He hesitated. The driving urge to go down to the surface was almost overwhelming—to grapple with them and try once again to break through their barrier there. "Why should they have the same weakness we have? They're aliens, not humans."

"Because they have been doing exactly the same thing that we would have done if we had been in their place. Think, Ben! In all the star systems they must have searched, no sign of intelligent life. Then, suddenly, a system that is teeming with life. Intelligent? Obviously. Dangerous? How could they know? *We* wouldn't have known, would we? What would we have done?"

Provost faltered. "Made contact . . ."

"Physical contact? Nonsense. We wouldn't have dared. We couldn't possibly risk contact until we knew how they thought and behaved—until we knew for cer-

tain that we could defend ourselves against them if necessary, that they had some kind of vulnerability. Once we knew that, the way would be open for contact. But no matter how eager we were for contact, and no matter how friendly they might appear *we would have had to have the weapon to fight them first*. Or take an insane risk, the risk of total destruction."

He understood her, but it didn't make sense. He thought of Miranda outpost, Titan Colony, and shook his head. "It doesn't add up," he said. "What they did here was incredible . . ."

"Only if you assumed that they were hostile," she said softly.

"What about the contact ship, the colony on Titan? They struck out at them."

"Because they had to. They did what we would have done under the same circumstances. They goaded us. Then they took cover and waited to see what we would do. They made us come after them where we couldn't reach them physically, to see what we could do. They deliberately kept one step ahead, making us reveal ourselves every step of the way, until they hit the spot they were seeking

and threw us into panic. What they failed to realize was that they were inevitably mirroring themselves in everything they did."

Silence then. In the dark cubicle, Provost could see the hazy image of the girl in his mind, pleading with him, trying to make him understand. And gradually it began to make sense. "So they have their weapon," he said slowly, "and still we can't make contact with them because *we* have none against *them*."

"*Had* none," the girl corrected him. "But we have seen them in the mirror. Their thoughts and actions and approach have been human-like. They recognized our panic for what it was when they saw it."

"And now?"

"We turn the tables," she said. "If they also have a vulnerability, there will be no more barrier to contact. But we have to *know*. Every time they have goaded us we have reacted. We've got to stop that now. We've got to withdraw from them completely, leave them with nothing to work with, nothing to grasp."

"But the Satellite . . ."

"The Satellite is dead for the time being, asleep. There

is nothing but us left for them to contact. Now we have to withdraw too. Can you see now what they will have to do?"

Slowly he nodded. He sensed that she hadn't told him all of it, but that, too, was all right. Better that there be *nothing* that the Enemy could draw from his mind. "You tell me what to do, and when," he said.

"Then close your mind down, as completely as you can. Barricade it against them, if you can. Keep them out, leave nothing open for them to probe. Cut them off cold. But be ready when I signal you."

He twisted in the cramped seat in the cubicle, clamping down his control as he felt Dorie clamping down hers. It was an exercise in patience and concentration, but slowly he felt his mind clearing. Like a rheostat imperceptibly dimming the lights in a theater, the Satellite went dimmer, dimmer, almost-dead. Only a flicker of activity remained, tiny and insignificant—

They waited.

It might have been hours, or even days, before the probing from the Enemy began. Provost felt it first, for he had known it before, tiny

exploratory waves from the alien minds, tentative, easy to drive back. He caught himself just in time, allowed himself no response, trying to make his mind a blank gray surface, a sheet of nothing.

More probing then, more urgency. Sensations of surprise, of confusion, of concern. Unanswered questions, fleeting whispers of doubt in the alien minds. Slowly confusion gave way to doubt, then to fear.

This was something the Enemy had not expected, this sudden unequivocal collapse. The probing grew more frantic in its intensity. Deepening of doubt, and then, amazingly, regretfulness, self-reproach, uncertainty. *What has happened? Could we have destroyed them? Could we have driven them too far?*

The probing stopped abruptly. Provost felt the DepPsych girl stir; vaguely his eyes registered the darkness of the cubicle around him, the oval viewpoint in the wall showing the pale yellow globe of the planet lying below, its rings spreading like a delicate filigree . . .

Nothing.

In his own mind he felt a stir of panic, and fought it

down. What if the DepPsych girl were wrong? It was only a human mind which had assumed that creatures which behaved alike were alike. In the silence a thousand alternative possibilities flooded his mind. The minutes passed and the panic rose again, stronger . . .

And then he saw it in the viewport. Up from the methane clouds they came, slowly, four great ships in perfect formation. They rose and stabilized in orbit, moved again.

They were approaching the Satellite.

He felt his fingers clench on the grips as he watched, his mind leaping exultantly. *She had been right. They were forced out.* The offensive had shifted, and now *the Enemy* were forced to move.

They waited until the ships were very close. Then: "Provost! Now!"

They struck out together, as a unit, hard. They threw all the power they could muster, striking the sensitive alien minds without warning. They could feel the sudden crashing impact of their attack. He could never have done it alone; together their power was staggering. The alien minds were open, confused, defensive; they reeled

back in pain and in fear—

In panic.

Suddenly the four great ships broke apart. They moved out in erratic courses, driving back for the planet's surface. They scuttled like bugs when a rock is overturned, beyond control and frantic. In a matter of minutes they were gone again, and the silence rose like a cloud from the surface.

Somewhere a bell was ringing. Ben Provost heard it, dreamily, as he rose and stretched his cramped muscles. He met Dorie Kendall in the corridor, and he could tell from the look on her face that she knew it was over, too.

The aliens were vulnerable. They were vulnerable to the same primitive defense reactions that humans were when faced with a crisis: the suspension of reason and logic that constituted panic.

Now both sides had a weapon. The mirror had reflected the aliens accurately, and the meaning of the reflection was unmistakably clear. There need be no danger in contact anymore. Now there could be understanding.

They wakened the crew of the Satellite.

THE END



SIDE EFFECT

By JOSEPH D. LAVEN

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

It's like riding a bicycle when you're a little kid. At first you can do it with trainer wheels. Then someone takes those wheels away. And—surprise! You can still do it!

DOCTOR Edwin Kane placed both hands solidly on the glass topped mahogany desk, leaned across it and aimed a stubborn, pointed chin at the multi-starred staff officer behind it.

"Let's get this straight General. Are you gently tell-

me to toss away several years of research and forget my project?"

"In my own inept way, yes," the gray haired man answered.

"For pete's sake why?"

Mayor General Daniels studied the thirty-year-old

physicist briefly before he replied. "Doctor Kane, you're a recognized authority in your field and an expert in several others, a man of your ability shouldn't ask foolish questions."

"Foolish questions," exploded the scientist straightening up to a full five feet seven inches, "what on earth is foolish about questioning a decision that kills one of the most remarkable developments in fifty years? Forgive my immodesty General, but this device is absolutely revolutionary."

"Exactly," snapped the officer, "that is the contention of the security department. The effects of your discovery might well shatter the country's economy and would certainly endanger its safety."

"Nuts," growled Kane running a hand through his sandy, crew-cut hair, "with proper controls the amplifier would—"

"Proper controls are what we intend to place on it," interrupted the officer rising from behind the desk and walking towards a large, heavy legged conference table across the room.

"What you intend to do is wrap it in official red tape and bury it in a bureaucratic cof-

fin," protested the physicist following the taller man.

"Bury it deep indeed, Doctor Kane," said the general stiffly as he picked a small brown leather covered case from the table.

"An asinine point of view."

"I doubt," continued Daniels as he turned to face the scientist, "that you have given serious thought to the difficulty of regulating your device but I can assure you the security department has. Since you first demonstrated the amplifier two weeks ago we have been working on the problem twenty-four hours a day, every day. So far," he added, "we have only the most nebulous ideas as to where and how to store it."

Holding the instrument in both hands the general continued, "Can you imagine," he asked, "what could happen if the wrong people got hold of this?" He looked past Kane's thin nose into a pair of pale green eyes and went on, "A package this size with the capacity to amplify extra sensory perception is potentially the most dangerous threat we have faced. Where do we conceal our nations' secrets against a device that enables the user to see through solid walls and sealed vaults? What can we protect from theft

when any article can be lifted practically effortlessly and glided through space by remote mental control? There are an infinite number of possibilities and most of them terrifying."

Kane felt the room grow much hotter as the implication became clear. He realized that he was sweating and inwardly cursed the reaction causing it. "There must be thousands of trustworthy men available," he declared earnestly, "why not select a special team to administer both research and security?"

The uniformed man returned the leather case to the table, stepped past the scientist and strolled unhurriedly back to his desk. He sat down and gazed thoughtfully at the young man across the room. "Have you really considered this? How many men do you know who can play God? The amplifier makes a man, almost any man, more powerful than the imagination dares to conceive. Even if there are those who can stand up under the temptation how can we be sure that we have picked the right ones?"

"I'd like to remind you General, I brought the amplifier to you."

"Unfortunately there are

few as altruistic as you," smiled Daniels, "and conditions and people change. Even you have changed Doctor Kane. If you had it to do over again would you bring the device to us?"

"Under the circumstances, hardly."

"You see?" the military man smiled thinly, "I have no illusions regarding the virtue of my fellow man. Anyone who understands the significance of your invention will be subjected to enticement close to overwhelming. In fact when the time comes, the preservation and storage problem will probably be directed by personnel who have no knowledge of the purpose, only the general electronic nature of the unit."

"If," asked the scientist scornfully, "the United States Government is so full of fear and trepidation, why not simply destroy it? That seems most sensible."

"Security reasons," Daniels answered and then added, "of a different nature of course. Ivan may well stumble on to the same basic principles and naturally we would need your gadget if that should occur."

Kane walked slowly across the carpeted floor and stood in front of the polished desk. He said quietly, "You are aware

of course, that I could build another one."

"Of course."

"What do you intend to do with me? Have me shot?"

The Officer ignored the sneer in the scientists' voice and replied very softly, "Believe me Doctor, we have considered it."

Kane chilled as he recognized the matter-of-fact sincerity in the man's voice and saw the frigid gray eyes measure him for effect.

"However," the general continued, "we might need your valuable services in the future. You are going to be an extremely well guarded man from now on." He read the expression on Kane's face. "We have not lowered ourselves to the level of our bearish brothers, Doctor. We are assigning a detail of men to keep you under twenty-four hour surveillance."

"How long will this bird-dogging last?"

"Indefinitely, however these men are highly trained specialists, after a few weeks you won't even notice them around."

"I wouldn't bet on it," the scientist snapped and abruptly changing the subject added, "you and your staff are preventing the use of an important scientific discovery,

you are letting fear rule your decisions."

"The subject is closed," stated the officer, "after your final demonstration this afternoon we will put the wraps on the amplifier and allow you to return home."

"It isn't closed as far as I am concerned," replied Kane heatedly, "I'm going to the President with this."

"You won't have far to go," assured the officer, "he's being briefed in the auditorium right now."

"The President is next door?"

"You didn't think we would make a decision of this nature without consulting the boss, did you?"

"I didn't know," conceded Kane.

"Well I can promise you we wouldn't. Now if you will sit down," he indicated the chair at the end of his desk, "I will brief you on what is expected in your demonstration."

The scientist sat in the chair he had occupied many times in the past two weeks and inquired glumly, "Are you sure you can trust me to make the demonstration?"

"It is felt we have made more than enough preparations in the line of security," responded Daniels, "in fact

while you are in the auditorium I suggest that you give the room close scrutiny. Some of the things you see might give you an idea of what I mean."

Kane regarded the intense expression on the gray haired security chief's face and refrained from comment.

The officer tilted back in his chair, clasped his hands behind his head and examined the ceiling abstractly before he spoke, "The first," he paused before using the term, "*act* to perform will be the levitations. We will have the usual articles on the stage for this purpose. You will follow this with an exhibition of matter transparency and conclude by opening a supposedly burglar proof safe which we procured this morning."

"You're sure I can open it?" asked Kane blandly.

Daniels contemplated the physicist with the same intense expression and then continued as if he hadn't been interrupted, "In the course of your demonstration at no time shall an object be levitated or cast in the direction of the presidential party. All objects in your control must be put in motion and moved slowly. This will not detract from the exhibition and will certainly help avoid accidents."

Kane flinched at the word *accidents*.

The officer brought his hands from behind his head and leaned forward in his chair. Lifting a pencil off the desk he pointed it at the scientist and asserted, "The order in which these demonstrations are performed is important. If you fail to remember or aren't sure, don't hesitate to ask. I will be sitting with the President and will be able to hear and answer you if necessary. Any deviation in the order could bring about an unfortunate misunderstanding."

"In what way?"

"Security personnel have been given a sequence list," explained Daniels without going into details.

"I see."

"Any further questions, Doctor?"

"I think not."

"Very well then," the officer said and leaned across the desk and pressed the intercom button, "will you inform the President that we are ready to begin the demonstration at his convenience."

"Yes sir," came a rigid voice from the box.

"While we are waiting," Daniels said, settling back into the leather upholstered

chair, "I would like to thank you on behalf of my staff and myself for the cooperation and courtesy you have given us these two weeks."

Kane said nothing.

"All of us here at security realize that you have made a significant contribution to our national scientific stockpile. We regret," he added, "the necessity of the action we are forced to take."

Kane grinned wryly at the officer and declared, "I am certain you are not fully aware of the significance of my contribution. If you were, the decisions you have made would be quite different."

The security department chief experienced a slight uneasiness at the scientist's comment. He started to question the remark when the intercom checked his thoughts. "Yes," he snapped.

"The presidential party is ready sir."

"Very well," he responded and rose from his desk, "Let's go Doctor." Striding to the table he picked up the amplifier and moved to the auditorium door where Kane waited for him. A military guard on the other side swung the heavy door open and the general motioned Kane ahead of him into the large room

where the previous demonstrations had taken place.

Kane, entering, noticed several radical changes in the layout. A low stage that reached across the width of the auditorium was still in place on his left side but from there past him to his right, the seats had been removed exposing the scarred, sloping floor. In front of the remaining seats a series of glass panels had been installed presenting a solid but transparent wall from one side of the room to the other. It was obviously bullet proof.

Behind this ground and polished barricade sat twenty-five or thirty of the nation's most renowned dignitaries. Kane recognized the chief executive sitting in the front row surrounded by a group of men in business suits he assumed to be secret service men.

General Daniels held the small case out to him and said, "If you will go to the stage now I will join the President to watch you put your amplifier through its paces."

"Certainly General," replied the scientist evenly as he surpressed a mounting eagerness.

"And Doctor."

"Yes?"

"Don't forget the sequence,"

warned the military man moving away.

Kane nodded and watched the guard lock the door to the office and follow the officer towards the glass paneling. He turned and walked down the sloping aisle to the stage, up six low steps and across the platform to a small metal table at the center. He set the psionic amplifier on the micarta top and snapped the switch to the *on* position.

On his left as he faced the audience was an array of articles to be used in the exhibition. A chair, two basketballs, a typewriter with a few sheets of white paper beside it and a gun-metal gray safe of the latest design.

In his elevated position the scientist could see directly into the slightly upturned faces of his audience. He calmly surveyed them as he rotated the tuning dial slowly, waiting for the tingling response in his brain as the unit matched frequencies with his own.

It came with the velvet softness that was expected, a quenching sensation which stifled the thirsting incompleteness of being human and gave him a sense of totality. It was a sensation he had carefully refrained from de-

scribing to the government specialists.

Kane's vision which was normally excellent sharpened to a delicate acuteness as he balanced the two frequencies.

He *saw*.

Through the gray auditorium walls, now only a shimmering mist to the physicist, he counted the security soldiers at their stations, machine guns at ready, pointing through what had been disguised gun ports. A technician sat at a control panel in an adjacent room pressing down a key. The key was connected to a relay which prevented a valve from opening in a simple piping system. Clever thought Kane. If I should force the fingers of the soldiers off their gun triggers I would undoubtedly stand a good chance of doing the same to the technician. The thought of a room full of nerve gas was exceedingly unappetizing.

His inspection continued out through the corridors until distance finally obscured the view as the limit of the amplifier's effectiveness was reached. The place was crawling with agents and soldiers of all descriptions. The general was right. They were well prepared.

As Kane completed his mental tour of the area, rest-

lessness was becoming apparent among his audience. Both the brass and the guards were getting uneasy at the delay. He leveled his pale green eyes directly at General Daniels and introduced an idea to the gray-haired officer, then suppressed a wicked grin as he watched the security chief lean over and speak to the President.

"It takes some time for the device to warm up."

"Very well General, we have plenty of time," commented the politician pompously.

Some of the guards looked at each other questioningly but they were soldiers and if the general said it took time for the gadget to warm up, it took time for it to warm up, even if it never had before.

Kane regretted the fact that a suggested thought did not persist but for some reason the planted ideas vanished when the unit was turned off.

He moved about the stage in a show of arranging the pieces to be levitated and cautiously probed the minds of his audience. He read the varying attitudes and impressions of the group as he worked. This was really having a finger on the pulse of the public, he reflected.

With his back to the audience he levitated the brown upholstered chair at the rear of the stage. Turning slowly to face the group he glided the chair to the center of the room where it hovered a few feet above the bare floor.

He stated quietly, "Mister President and gentlemen, I will now perform a series of manipulations which have been prescribed by General Daniels." The chair wavered noticeably as he spoke. It was difficult to carry on a conversation and concentrate enough to maintain a steady equilibrium in the object levitated.

Focusing his attention on the chair he moved it smoothly from one side of the auditorium to the other, raising and lowering it to show his complete control.

In spite of living in an age where scientific miracles had become commonplace, the wheeling, soaring motion of the chair had a startling effect on the officers and politicians. They leaned forward in body and stared at the phenomenon taking place before them, not quite able to believe it, yet knowing it *was* happening.

Kane guided the chair back to the stage and landed it gently next to the two basketballs, one of which he imme-

diately levitated and moved in a graceful arc to a position in the center of the room about four feet in the air. While the amazed audience stared, he started it spinning slowly on a vertical axis. The remaining ball now rose above the platform and progressed across the room to set in space some distance from the spinning sphere. This ball now began a leisurely circular trip around the one in the center, it too beginning to spin slowly on a vertical axis. A perfect, compressed air and leather planetary system.

One of the politicians, a red faced, heavy set individual forgot himself completely, rose from his seat and applauded loudly until an officer next to him tugged at his sleeve. He sat down redder than ever and very apologetic.

Doctor Edwin Kane was knocking them dead.

He returned the basketballs to the stage and informed the general, "I am ready for the transparency demonstration now."

The officer said something softly into a microphone installed in the arm of his chair and an enlisted man entered the room from behind the stage. With rehearsed move-

ments he quickly set up a short section of partition between the scientist and the end of the platform on which the typewriter and safe rested. Securing the portable wall in place the man wheeled the typewriter into position behind it and inserted a piece of white paper. Turning his back to the machine he tapped various keys at random.

Kane told the group, "The object of the man standing with his back to the typewriter is to preclude any possibility of thought transference. If the man should read the symbols he has written on the sheet he would transmit the knowledge to me unknowingly."

The scientist recited several letters, numbers and punctuation marks.

Turning to the typewriter the soldier removed the paper and in turn read the marks. They were exactly as the Doctor had stated.

"You see gentlemen," he went on, "the wall which has been erected here is almost completely transparent at will when using the amplifier, only the slightest of shadows remain in view from such a flimsily constructed object."

"Doctor," the president asked still leaning forward in his chair, "can anyone do

these things with this instrument?"

"I haven't carried out experiments to determine who can or can't use the device, however using Doctor Rhine's research as a yardstick, I would say no. There are probably those who would get no results and others who would get negative results."

"What would negative results consist of?"

"I wouldn't like to guess."

The politician's dismissal irked Kane but he knew it was better to ignore it. He said coolly, "If there are no further questions I will now open the safe you see on your right."

Without waiting for further comment Kane focused his attention on the thick fire resistant door. Its heavy steel and brick construction made viewing more difficult than the thin wall had, but not enough to seriously deter his manipulation of the locking mechanism. He raised each thin metal bar against the spring tension which held it and swung the door open. The operation was completed in seconds.

A murmur ran through the collection of bureaucratic nobility. Those with large financial interests were more than

a little disturbed at the ease with which the job was accomplished. This weapon was dangerous.

Kane resisted the urge to probe deeper into the minds of some of the audience and said simply, "The demonstration is completed gentlemen."

General Daniels spoke up, "When you leave the stage please bring the amplifier with you."

Kane knew that compliance was expected without delay. The party was over. He turned and walked unwillingly to the small table where the amplifier rested. He hesitated, reluctant to reach out and return to the world of the blind. It was a moment during which a half-dozen trigger fingers tightened and tension gripped the security force.

He snapped it off.

His vision blurred, the room wavered before him as he ceased to receive the energy needed to sustain ESP. The tingling sensation died slowly and he experienced a feeling of deep depression.

Normality.

The physicist picked up the amplifier and crossed the stage, stepped down the short stairs and walked wearily up the aisle to meet the general.

Several members of his audience had risen from their

chairs and were filing out a rear exit. The president sat talking with some of the group.

General Daniels moved through a sliding glass panel and met Kane at the entrance to the office. The military man smiled generously and said, "Very good show Doctor," and held out his hand for the amplifier.

Kane handed him the unit and nodded toward the emptying chairs, "I'd like to speak to some of the group before they leave."

"No need to take the time."

"But——"

"The boss had already confirmed our stand."

"Are you afraid to risk questions?"

"The matter is closed," snapped Daniels.

The neatly uniformed guard swung the office door open and stepped aside. Daniels gripped the scientist's arm and steered him through the entrance.

As they entered Kane saw a group of men dressed in business suits standing together near the window. They turned to face him and waited. The one really outstanding feature about them he noted was the total lack of identity they had attained. Each look-

ed like the man most likely to be ignored in a crowd. They were obviously secret service men. His men.

The officer lead Kane across the room to where the men waited and said, "I'd like you to meet these gentlemen. You'll be seeing a great deal of each other. Gentlemen this is Doctor Edwin Kane. Doctor Kane meet James Mitford, Glen Mitford, Bill Mitford, Frank Mitford, Joe Mitford, Mike Mitford."

Kane got the idea.

Respectively the men stepped forward to shake hands with the scientist. He smiled up at each and shook hands warily as if he were meeting a prospective brother-in-law. They were all at least a head taller than he.

"These men know a great deal about you Doctor and in the future will get to know you better than you know yourself."

"Undoubtedly," admitted Kane sourly.

"We have written a set of instructions outlining the limitations on your contacts and experiments." The general walked to his desk and picked up a thick brown envelope and returned. Handing the envelope to Kane he continued, "The Mitfords have received similiar instructions so

there will be no doubt as to your permitted field of activity."

"I see." The *permitted* hurt.

"There is no reason why we should delay your return home," the general concluded, "it has been a pleasure working with you."

"I won't pretend that it has been enjoyable, General," answered Kane moving toward the door, "I am dead certain you have made a serious mistake."

"Goodbye Doctor Kane."

One of the Mitfords detached himself from the others, held the door to the corridor open and followed the physicist out.

In the elevator going down to street level the secret service man ignored the scientist completely. The agent could have passed for a busy executive on his way to lunch. Kane was somewhat relieved when the man made no effort to carry on a conversation. He was left undisturbed.

On the ground floor Kane pushed his way through the thick glass door and stepped out into the hurrying noon-time crowds. The air was crisp and fresh for the city. He inhaled deeply and pulled his hat down over his eyes to

shade them from the bright spring sunshine. For two weeks he had been practically imprisoned.

In an attempt to unwind after his last demonstration the physicist strolled slowly up the sidewalk, his guard followed at a discreet distance. He felt tired and letdown, the side effect of the amplifier making itself apparent. The knowledge of defeat wasn't helping him any either. He had left six years of concentrated effort in the hands of people who couldn't or wouldn't make an attempt to use it.

He walked along being jostled and pushed by rushing pedestrians. The bustling activity was welcome after the measured pace of the military atmosphere. He paused to look into a shop window and was jolted by the crashing impact of a young boy who had run into him.

"Scus me," gasped the youngster breathlessly and ran down the sidewalk without looking back.

"Okay," smiled Kane and he stepped aside to make way for an even smaller girl who tore past him after the older boy.

Kane grinned and shook his head as he watched the boy dart between two parked cars

and run into the busy street with the little blonde girl scurrying hot on his heels.

She didn't quite make it.

The tires of the tractor-trailer rig screeched against the pavement as the hapless driver slammed on his brakes.—too late.

Kane looked on helplessly as the girl caught sight of the huge truck and screamed in terror. The scientist's whole being wrenched with dismay. Something gave inside.

He saw.

The world stopped then moved in slow motion. Without effort he levitated the girl and deposited her on the sidewalk in front of him.

Fulfillment. The soft ting-

ling sensation remained with him. He was *whole*.

In the cab of the halted truck the driver slumped shaking across the steering wheel unable to believe that the miracle had happened.

Danger. Now!

Behind Kane the quick witted government agent reached for the automatic nestled in his shoulder holster. His hand touched the butt of the heavy weapon and then for a reason he could never quite understand was unable to lift it out.

Doctor Edwin Kane, *homo-superior*, laughed silently at the bewildered man's dilemma and sauntered away to disappear in the crowded city.

THE END

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This is the second in a series of articles by Sam Moskowitz, quasi-official historian of fantasy and science fiction, which analyze the achievements and contributions of outstanding names in the field. Future issues will feature evaluations of the Czech, Karel Capek, of the little-known English fantasists, M. P. Shiel and H. F. Heard; and of the American, Philip Wylie.



OLAF STAPLEDON: Cosmic Philosopher

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

THE most titanic imagination to ever write science fiction was undoubtedly W. Olaf Stapledon. The publication of his first work of fiction, *Last and First Men*, by Methuen, London, in 1930 was an instant critical success despite the fact that it caught both the literati and the science fiction world by surprise. Neither group had ever heard of Mr. Stapledon, nor were they prepared for the stunning cosmic sweep and fabulous grandeur

of the ideas and philosophical concepts to be found in the work. The response to this book was extraordinary.

"But far and away the best book of this kind in our time—yes, I will risk it for once, a masterpiece—is Olaf Stapledon's amazing chronicle of the next two thousand million years," wrote renowned author J. B. Priestley in the *CLARION*.

"As original as the solar system," enthused the Gothic

master, Hugh Walpole, in **THE BOOK SOCIETY NEWS**.

"There have been many visions of the future, and a few fine ones. But none in my experience as strange as *Last and First Men*. Mr. Stapledon possesses a tremendous and beautiful imagination," was the evaluation of novelist Arnold Bennett, writing for the **EVENING STANDARD**.

These reviews were not exceptions, they were universally typical on almost all levels of the literary world.

When *Last and First Men* appeared in 1930, science fiction in magazine form was already in full flower in the United States. There were seven magazines, presenting highly advanced material and most aspects of the field had at least been probed, if not exhaustively mined. Development of science fiction as a form of literary art and more specifically as the well of new ideas, flowed from the magazines. Little appeared, even in book form, that was not strongly influenced by periodical science fiction.

William Olaf Stapledon was to prove not only the infrequent exception to this fact but one of the most pivotally powerful prime movers in the history of modern science fiction.

Last and First Men projects the history of mankind from 1930 to the end of recorded time—2,000 million years in the future—when one of the Last Men, through a method of temporal projection, succeeds in transmitting to his distant ancestors, the incredible saga of a history that was to become our future.

The passage of events in these past 30 years has deprived the early chapters of the book of any validity as prophecy. Nevertheless, so skilled is the presentation that the reader can easily imagine himself on a different time track and thereby retain his willing suspension of disbelief.

The history begins with a divided and warring Europe called into conference with the president of the United States and a Chinese inventor. At the meeting, which takes place in England, the Chinaman demonstrates that he has perfected an atomic bomb. At the same time as the demonstration, an American air fleet, goaded by provocative incidents, has engaged the United European air fleet in combat and destroyed it.

As the victorious American air fleet sweeps upon England, it is destroyed with atomic weapons by common consent

of the government heads assembled, including America's president.

In retaliation, an enraged America almost purges Europe of life through the use of gas and deadly bacteria. A later showdown with China finds America again victorious and a world state is formed.

This is only the beginning of a rich and fertile work which widens increasingly in scope, progressing from peak to brilliantly imaginative peak. The entire panorama of mankind is spread before us. We read of the end of the Americanized era and the entrance into another dark age, eventually followed by the rise of Patagonia as a world center of culture. The rediscovery of atomic energy causes the downfall of the Patagonian civilization as the result of a chain explosion. In the ten million years that ensue, the monkeys rise as a competitive, intelligent race, commanding subhuman slaves. Eventually the monkeys are exterminated by their own weaknesses and the revolt of their vassals. The rise of a great new human civilization follows.

The invasion of the Martians, microscopic creatures which travel in jelly-like floating clouds like mist, results in a war between Mars and the

Earth. All life is wiped out on Mars, but a destructive virus from the dust of Martian bodies sends mankind back to savagery.

A civilization of new men eventually arises which is in tune with nature and the wilderness. This race gradually advances to the point where it breeds stupendous brains which first aid and then rule all mankind. Eventually, frustrated by their physical limitations in their quest for the only thing that means anything to them—knowledge—the great brains scientifically create a race of mental and physical supermen to replace them.

The approach of the time when the moon will move so close to Earth that it will blow up and destroy the surface of the planet, forces migration to Venus. There, the contemporary intelligent life forms are destroyed, the planet reshaped and man evolves into a winged creature. Millions of years pass and it becomes necessary to migrate to Neptune when it is discovered that collision with a wandering gaseous body will cause our sun to become a nova.

On Neputune, natural and scientific progress create's a truly Utopian society, but man

is drastically changed, even to the point where the number of sexes required for procreation is increased. The end of all mankind occurs when the sun unaccountably accelerates the rate at which it burns up its energy and the heat dooms the last men before any scientific provision can be made to save the race.

However, before the end, the last men fire countless artificial human spores into space, hoping to eventually seed worlds of other suns.

The simple chronology of events fails to do *Last and First Men* justice. Stapledon deals in depth with every phase of human development, covering not only the scientific aspects but also the social, cultural, sexual, psychological and philosophical changes. The core of this book, written with only fragmentary dialogue as a straight narrative, is philosophy, and not philosophy on a sophomoric level, but that of true stature.

The events are related in a style of unique power and poetry. There is extraordinary beauty of phrasing and literally hundreds of plot ideas that have since seeded themselves in the fabric of modern science fiction.

Last and First Men made its

American debut in 1931 and the reaction was only slightly less enthusiastic than that of Great Britain. The late Elmer Davis, renowned radio commentator, author and journalist, called it, "the boldest and most imaginative book of our times."

The sensational NEW YORK EVENING GRAPHIC for October 3, 1931, devoted a full page with three illustrations to the enthusiastic review of critic Lloyd Franklin who stated, "The author out-Wells H. G. Wells, out-Shaws George J. Bernard and knocks Jules Verne for a loop."

Insurance that the impact of Stapledon would be thoroughly felt in American science fiction circles was provided by Hugo Gernsback's WONDER STORIES, which listed *Last and First Men* in a series of full page advertisements run in 1931, making outstanding science fiction novels available to its readers.

Similarities were obvious in the famous *Man Who Awoke Series* by Laurence Manning which ran as a series of five complete stories in WONDER STORIES from March to August, 1933. Manning's lead character is carried in a series of steps into a future which is very much like Stapledon's. There is, for example, an era

ruled by giant brains, a period of a back-to-nature movement, and a finale ending on a Stapledonian philosophical note as the last men strive to determine the nature of life and the meaning of the Universe.

In more recent times, the classic *City* series which, when combined into a book won *The International Fantasy Award* as the outstanding volume of 1953, also evidenced in its form and content some influences of *Last and First Men*.

Inevitably, so successful a first novel called for a sequel and Stapledon obliged with *Last Men in London*, published in 1932 by Methuen. This fictional-philosophical tract cannot be truly appreciated without prior reading of *Last and First Men*. The title itself is completely misleading, because it does not refer to the last men *alive* in London after some disaster, as one might expect, but to a mental visit by one of the Last Men who perished on Neptune in Stapledon's *first* book back to our era and his reactions to what he sees.

Through the words of this superman observer, Stapledon is enabled to present his philosophical observations on the life and times of the period running briefly from World

War I to 1932. The most fascinating part of the volume from the viewpoint of the science fiction reader is the extremely substantial elaboration on the science, life, customs and philosophy of mankind on Neptune which *supplements* material in *Last and First Men*. Though the book was not as successful as Stapledon's previous work, it did see a second edition in 1934.

Meanwhile, the literary set and the science fiction readers received a trickle of information about Stapledon's background. He was born May 10, 1886 in the town of Wirral, near Liverpool, England. His childhood was spent on the Suez. His parents had some means and he was educated at Abbolsholme School and then at Ballial College, Oxford, emerging with his Master of Arts degree. He taught a year at Manchester Grammar School, then worked in a shipping office in Liverpool, lecturing on history and English Literature evenings for the Workers' Educational Association under the auspices of the University of Liverpool.

During World War I, Olaf Stapledon served three years with the Friends Ambulance Unit, attached to French

Armed Forces. Prior to World War I, he developed an interest in communism and socialism and managed to see printed two small volumes of revolutionary poetry.

Following World War I, he culminated a sporadic 12-year courtship by marrying Agnes Miller, an Australian girl. Two children, a daughter and a son, resulted from the union.

He returned to the University of Liverpool and, majoring in philosophy and psychology, received his Doctor of Philosophy degree. He then proceeded to lecture on these subjects at the University and elsewhere.

During this period he framed the ideas for his first philosophical effort, *A Modern Theory of Ethics*, which Methuen published in 1929. Termed "A study of the relations of Ethics and Psychology," the work, as a major part of its thesis, evaluates the Freudian theory of the origin of morality and discards it in favor of an intellectual morality which is an outgrowth of the theological "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This would insist on spontaneous sympathy for even "aliens" who are known to be in need. It would obligate one to extend help even if the

recipient made no direct appeal, was not a friend or a close relative and whether or not any "spontaneous sympathy" were felt—merely on the basis of the objective evidence that help was necessary.

Writing of science fiction was inspired from absorbing the efforts of H. G. Wells, Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs, but Stapledon denied any reading of science fiction magazines prior to 1936. Nevertheless, it was science fiction that made Olaf Stapledon as a philosopher.

Impressed by the immensity of his vision and his evident broad understanding of the philosophical and psychological structure of society as expressed in *Last and First Men* and *Last Man in London*, the book-reading public was pleased to learn that Stapledon was a really accredited philosopher and not a dilettante. They were ripe for *Waking World*, a militant philosophical and political discussion published by Methuen in 1934. Stapledon admits in this book that the bulk of his livelihood came from dividends on family investments, even while he proclaims, "the system on which I live must go." *Waking World* also reveals a wide respect for H. G. Wells social views.

Distinctly revolutionary in tone, Stapledon in *Waking World*, viewed the capitalistic system as a decadent order that must be discarded. He deplored violence but could find no brief for pacifism. On religion he is a bit left of agnosticism and politically a bit right of communism. His objectivity and even favor towards Communism caused one exponent to term him sentimentally as "the last of the great bourgeois philosophers."

Stapledon is admittedly most philosophically impressed by the views of Spinoza and Hegel. He was, if anything, even more optimistic than they, expressing the thought: "Indeed it is not inconceivable that man is the living germ which is destined to vitalize the whole cosmos!"

In this period, and particularly in *Waking World*, Stapledon the philosopher, is somewhat cocky, somewhat sure of himself. It is 1934 and everything is in a deplorable state. A lot of people agree with his ideas and tell him so. His patient is the world and he precisely and confidently diagnoses its illnesses and cures.

The next year it was back to fiction again with *Odd John: A Story Between Jest*

and *Earnest*, published by Methuen in 1935. *Odd John* is a story about a human mutant who is almost as far above men as men are above monkeys. It was not the first story of its type, nor even the first such outstanding story. *The Hampdenshire Wonder* by renowned British novelist J. D. Beresford, first published in 1911, handled a similar theme with such consummate artistry that it has become a science fiction classic and Stapledon has acknowledged his debt to that earlier work. The renowned American mathematician, Eric Temple Bell, writing under the name of John Taine, rendered an outstanding example of the superman, stressing biological aspects in *Seeds of Life*, which appeared in the Fall, 1931 issue of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY. Philip Wylie of *Generations of Vipers* fame, scored a hit with *Gladitor*, a novel of a purely physical superman, published by Knopf in 1930. *Odd John* certainly deserves to be ranked with those novels, and unquestionably brings to focus a much more penetrating insight on the possible outlook and morality of a super being than does its predecessors.

Up to this time, Olaf Stapledon had written his science fic-

tion with little awareness of the impact his work had made on the writers and readers of that field. Though he had frequent contacts with H. G. Wells, it was not until Eric Frank Russell, then an embryo science fiction author, called on him the Summer of 1936, that he seriously related himself to the mainstream of fantastic literature.

"Since then I have been looking through a few of them (science fiction magazines)" Stapledon told Walter Gillings, publisher of the British science fiction fan magazine SCIENTIFICTION, "and I was very surprised to find that so much work of this kind was being done. My impression was that the stories varied greatly in quality. Some were only superficially scientific, while others contained very striking ideas, vividly treated."

"On the whole, I felt that the human side was terribly crude, particularly the love interest. Also there seemed to me far too much padding in most of them, in proportion to the genuine imaginative interest."

At the time of the interview, in the Spring of 1937, the proofs of his new book, *The Star Maker*, had already been

corrected. Commenting on that book, Stapledon told Gillings: "*Star Maker* is, I fear, a much wilder, more remote and philosophical work than *Last and First Men*, and may make it look rather microscopic by comparison. It will probably be my last fantastic book. I am now writing a little book on philosophy for the general public."

If any work of imaginative fiction can truly be described as a *tour de force*, that effort is *The Star Maker*. Though in actual quality of writing and inspired delineation of subject matter it did not surpass *Last and First Men*, the soaring magnificence of its concepts and breathtaking scope transcend any known work of science fiction.

Where, in *Last and First Men*, Stapledon strove to unveil the future history of mankind, in *The Star Maker* he set out to relate the entire history of the *universe*, from its creation to its end. In that framework, the 2,000 million years covered in *Last and First Men* rated little more than a sentimental episode in the perspective of the cosmos.

Commencing from a view of life on planets of other star systems, utilizing the intellectual spirit of an earthman as the observer, Stapledon places

special emphasis upon the symbiotic relationship of two sub-galactic races, the Echino-derm and the Nautiloids, who are to play a key role in progress as one of the most highly developed civilizations in the universe. These chapters seem to represent the origin of modern science fiction stories based on symbiosis, including the pace-setter, *Symbiotica* by Eric Frank Russell, in the October, 1943 issue of **ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION**.

Far more important in its profound influence on modern science fiction is Stapledon's elaborate descriptions of galactic wars and the organization of galactic empires composed of thousands of planets. While it is possible that there may have been some reference to galactic empires in science fiction in the past, nevertheless it is a fact that the present trend can be traced precisely back to *The Star Maker*. The galactic empires so essential to many of the stories of the modern greats of science fiction, including Robert A. Heinlein, Clifford D. Simak, Eric Frank Russell, Isaac Asimov, Murray Leinster, and literally dozens of other writers, are an inspiration of Olaf Stapledon and stem from the year 1937.

Similarly, placing the story on another star system and turning the plot on the psychology or philosophy of the inhabitants, instead of through direct action, is another tremendous contribution of Olaf Stapledon to science fiction. Such ideas virtually did not exist before the writing of *The Star Maker*.

It follows that Stapledon may well be the most important builder of the plot structure of contemporary science fiction! We discover, in the final analysis, that *Last and First Men* and *The Star Maker* are the old and new testaments of modern science fiction writers and it takes very little investigation to reveal that today's science fiction has standardized its background and approach, utilizing Stapledon's works as the bible. Older writers adopted precepts directly from his pages because of their need for a lighthouse in the imaginative immensity of Island Universes where formerly no guide existed. Newer writers accept the dogmas on faith.

In *The Star Maker*, when finally there was an end to empire-making and peace reigned, a utopia developed in which there telepathically came into being the Cosmic Mind—a state of existence

where every mentally developed creature could share the ideas and experiences of all of the diverse and incalculably numerous intelligences of the universe. To supplement mental contact there were visits between communities that took the extreme of moving entire planets out of orbit and projecting them across galactic immensities.

Efforts to move entire systems with their *suns* resulted in the startling discovery that those flaming bodies were intelligent beings with a community sense. The suns, for ethical and moral reasons, attempt to destroy the parasites that are disrupting their harmony with the infinite whole. Eventually, mental rapport was established between planetary life and the suns and a peaceful understanding concluded.

Stapledon presents the nebula as living creatures with the stars their spawn. He delves into their lives, their thoughts, their philosophy and ambitions.

Finally he braves the question of *The Star Maker*, the element creator of the universe, observable as a prodigious star of such brightness and magnitude that it could not be approached. The function of the Star Maker is to

create. The entity, potentially omnipotent, begins with infantile experiments, then matures and learns from its mistakes. The intense strife and suffering of living creatures in the course of the development of the universe is part of its self education, so that the next time it casts a new universe, it can try a different tack to see if previous errors can be eliminated.

While great philosophers of history have searched man's *past* to find the answers to the riddle of life, Olaf Stapledon, with an awesome, visionary probe, explores the *future* for the same answers. By driving his imagination to its extreme, he attempts to project the ultimate development and achievements of life forms and from them determine the purpose of existence.

Dissatisfied with The Cosmic Mind as a unity, Stapledon is forced to devise a *Star Maker*, who, through mathematics, physics and spiritual need, would fill the place that religion has reserved for God.

The paper-bound vogue was in full flower in England and Pelican books, a facet of famed Penguin Books, had reprinted *Last and First Men*. Now, as non-fiction originals, they issued in 1939, Olaf Sta-

pledon's *Philosophy and Living*. This is Stapledon's most general work of philosophy and the one most indicative of the scope of his studies and thinking on the subject, which is impressive. Actually, it is somewhat too involved for the layman, but may prove important for an ultimate evaluation of Stapledon as a philosopher, since it is the purest of his philosophical presentations.

By contrast, *New Hope for Britain*, published the same year, is really a philosophical justification for political action and an exhortation for the adoption of socialism in England as the first step towards a world state.

Saints and Revolutionaries, still another 1939 appearance, was published by William Heineman, London, as part of the "I Believe" volumes, a series of personal statements by such well-known figures as J. D. Beresford, Charles Williams, Gerald Bullett and Kenneth Ingram as well as Olaf Stapledon. As its title implies, this book is a detailed philosophical consideration of the similarities and differences of people characterized as saints or as revolutionaries. It ends with the thought that eventually the Cosmic Mind, such as suggested in *The Star Maker*,

may be achieved and in accomplishing this man will have created his "mythical" God image.

Olaf Stapledon clearly foresaw World War II in his Preface to *The Star Maker*, which began with the words: "At a moment when Europe is in a danger of a catastrophe worse than that of 1914 a book like this may be condemned as a distraction from the desperately urgent defense of civilization against modern barbarism." How did such a man, obviously of extraordinarily high intelligence and sensitivity, react to the second great war in his lifetime? The answer lies in his books.

During the early part of the war, he wrote *Darkness and Light*, a work of the same style as *Last and First Men*, purporting to show two different worlds and two futures depending on whether the powers of darkness or of light won out. As far as it goes, *Darkness and Light* is certainly fascinating reading but its prime conclusion seems to be that the major hope for mankind is the coming-into-being, either artificially or through mutation, of an advanced species which will possess more of the godliness and less of the animal.

Darkness and Light, thereby, swings *Odd John* more clearly into the perspective of Stapledon's philosophy and establishes his true reasons for exploring the superman concept.

The same year, Searchlight, another paper-back firm, issued Olaf Stapledon's newest philosophical effort, *Beyond the 'Isms*. This work examined the major religions and political movements, and though it found them basically wanting, it drew from them the suggestion that the development of the "spirit" was the only answer to a better future. Given as a definition of "spirit" was: "The spirit manifests itself solely in personality-in-community.... We shall always recognize that both individual and society are abstractions, and neither can exist without the other. ... And expression of the spirit, let it never be forgotten, means development in sensitive and intelligent awareness, love and creative action."

Many of Stapledon's works of fiction are prefaced by the phrase: "This is not a novel." Meaning, that though fiction, it does not conform to the basics generally associated with a romantic, imaginative

work. No such remarks preceded *Sirus: A Fantasy of Love and Discord*, published in 1944. As a novel this is the finest of all of Stapledon's fictional efforts. It deals with experiments in England which produce a super male dog—a dog with intelligence equal and possibly higher than that of a human being. The methods by which this dog is trained, the problems of his adjustment to both human and canine society are brilliantly and incisively presented. The consequences of a love affair (with all of its implications) between *Sirus*, the dog, and *Plaxy*, the girl who raised him, provide raw, adult reading with distinct allegorical applications to the world's race situation. Within the bounds of science fiction *Sirus* is a great masterpiece, pregnant with meaning, poetic and poignant in beauty of style. With this book, Stapledon proved that regardless of the final verdict on him as a philosopher, it would be hard to dispute his polished skill as a story teller.

The fictional triumph of his suggestion of worshipping the "spirit" as put forward in *Beyond the 'Isms* was described in Stapledon's short story, *Old Man in New World*, which appeared in 1944 as a

slim volume under the auspices of P.E.N., a world association of writers originally sponsored by H. G. Wells. A group of modern saints and revolutionaries, the "agnostic mystics" start a global strike on the eve of the third world war, resulting in an American revolution and a switch in Russian policy. A world state is formed and a condition of near-Utopia attained, but in the end, Stapledon predicts a human reversion to nationalism and religion which will renew, in his view, the old vicious cycle.

The final answer to how the war affected Olaf Stapledon is to be found in his novel-length prose poem titled *Death Into Life* and published in 1946. Here the exploration of mysticism as an end in itself is pronounced enough to be called a retreat. The feelings of a rear gunner of a bomber going into battle are described, followed by his death and contact with the spirits of the rest of the crew and the spirits of others who have died. Finally, these merge into "the Spirit of Man" which becomes a philosophical tool for Stapledon to explore, the past, present and the future. There are brief sections describing a tomorrow extremely reminiscent of his past works.

A non-fiction book, *Youth and Tomorrow*, issued by the St. Botolph Publishing Co., London in 1946, finds Stapledon repeating his thesis that personality-in-community and worship of the spirit represent the only hope for improvement of the modern world. The ultimate salvation he reiterates, rests in future man biologically improving the species.

A brief return to the type of fantasy that had established his reputation came with *The Flames*, a 25,000-word science fiction tale published by Secker and Warburg, London, in 1947. Writing cogently and well, Stapledon relates the efforts of flame creatures from the sun (alluded to in *The Star Maker*), who have been stranded on earth, to convince mankind that a permanently radioactive area be established so as to make conditions more tolerable for them here. In return, they offer human society the spiritual guidance to help solve its dilemma. Suspicious of the motives of the *Flames*, the earth contact rejects salvation for fear of slavery. The story is minor, however, being little more than a review of ideas previously presented.

Stapledon never lost his in-

terest in the prospects of interplanetary travel. He was a member of The British Interplanetary Society and delivered an address at their London session of October 9, 1948 on *Interplanetary Man*, in which he noted the irony of this world about to destroy itself on the threshold of reaching the stars. The entire 5,000-word address, discussing "the profound ethical, philosophical and religious questions which will undoubtedly arise from interplanetary exploration," was printed in the November, 1948 JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH INTERPLANETARY SOCIETY.

Then occurred an experience which must have had a profound effect upon Olaf Stapledon. The National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions, labelled by newspapers as a Communist-front organization, announced with great fanfare, the organization of The Cultural and Scientific Conference for Peace, to be held in New York and to be followed by a country-wide tour. Outstanding figures from many nations were invited. Dmitri Shostakovich, noted Russian composer, was the star of the program and represented the calibre of delegates desired from each nation. Olaf Stapledon was one of only five

invited from Great Britain. Visas to all but Stapledon were refused.

Stapledon was introduced in Newark, N. J., March 30, 1949, by Millard Lampell—noted for the shooting script of the motion picture *A Walk in the Sun*—as the author of "that magnificent fantasy, *Last and First Men* . . . speaking here today because he does not want to be the last man in the world."

The answers that had once so easily flowed from Stapledon's pen were gone. "I am not a communist," he stated with emphasis, "I am not a Christian, I am just me! I am, however, a socialist, as are the majority of my countrymen. . . . Let individualism triumph over your sense of individuality. *Forget one another's mistakes and for God's sake let's get together!*"

He returned to Europe greatly depressed. "There may be a war at any moment," he told newspaper reporters upon his return.

One more bit of fantasy was still to appear. *A Man Divided*, under the Methuen imprint in 1950.

Fantasy?

Autobiography is the more apt term. Ostensibly concerning a man of dual personality, who seesaws between brilliant

clarity of thought and action and "doltish" mass thinking, *A Man Divided* transparently presents the events and agonizing intellectual conflicts by which Stapledon fashioned his philosophy and an intimate picture of his personality and life from 1912 to 1948.

It was as if Stapledon had a strange premonition and felt an urgent need for summing up, for within months of the publication date of *A Man Divided*, William Olaf Stapledon was dead. The end came on September 6, 1950, in Cheshire, England, at the age of 64 and was attributed to a coronary occlusion.

The strangest was yet to come.

His widow, Agnes Z. Stapledon, painstakingly transcribed from his pencilled draft, a final, unfinished book of philosophy, published in 1954 by Methuen and titled *The Opening of the Eyes*. A life-long friend, E. V. Rieu, in a preface to the book, told of a final meeting with Stapledon after his return from America and a year before his death. "He had reached the goal of his thinking," Rieu said, "he had come to terms with reality;

and comprehension had been added to acceptance. There was a note of serenity in his bearing, that is a pleasure to remember now that he is gone."

This is the core of what Olaf Stapledon said in that final book:

"Is this perhaps hell's most exquisite refinement, that one should be haunted by the ever-present ghost of a disbelieved-in God? . . . Illusion though you are, I prefer to act in the pretense of your reality, rather than from stark nothingness. Without the fiction of your existence, I am no more than a reflex animal and the world is dust."

He had accepted God.

"Above all I spurn the subtle lure that snares the comrades," he continued, *"the call of brotherhood in the Revolution, and in mankind's seeming progress! There can be no progress but the lonely climbing of each solitary soul toward you."*

He had renounced communism and socialism.

Olaf Stapledon died with his life-long mental anguish resolved.

He had attained The Cosmic Mind at last.

THE END



THE FIFTIETH YEAR OF APRIL

By ARTHUR PORGES

*A fascinating reinterpretation
of a great man's death.*

AMONG the beings often hostile to man, there are some which are small and invisible, but capable of great mischief. These imps are under Belphegor, a mighty demon, and to them he gives men and women as playthings; for to Belphegor and his kind, man is merely a mortal, inferior, and stupid animal—something to provide amusement until broken.

In spite of the rising birth-rates, available humans have always been in short supply compared to the hordes of desirous petty spirits. M'lo and Gri had waited more than three hundred years for their chance. Gri received a baby, finally, and rejoiced, although it seemed a poor specimen—ugly, born in poverty, and far from the big population centers.

Although Gri was without personal experience in such matters, he slipped readily into the infant's soft skull, and

in a frenzy of delight tugged wildly at nerve endings, thumped the tender gray cells, and capered over the pulsing tissue until his slave's eyes rolled epileptically in their sockets. It is there, in the skull, that these tiny creatures can exert maximum power, since their most effective range is only a few inches.

To M'lo was assigned at the same time another newborn human—a girl; but because of the imp's abandon, or her own hereditary weakness, the baby died within an hour of her birth, and M'lo emerged raging from the quiet little head.

Belphegor heard his complaint in silence, and brushed it aside, refusing to give him another chattel. Furious and bitter, M'lo rashly forgot his place, and Belphegor, grim giant, arrogant and pitiless, took him up between thumb and forefinger, saying: "Insolent fool. The way these vermin are breeding, you'd have

had another in a hundred years. But now you must be punished first. From this moment, for a millennium, you must remain with a single handful of earth. Stay here and acquire philosophy." And Belphegor, with one finger, thrust a hole in the side of a desolate hill, prodding the imp down like a cork into a bottle.

"Wherever this lump of dirt is moved, there you will go, never to be more than three inches away until your thousand years of punishment is over."

And M'lo, chastened, bowed his head, asking in a tiny, buzzing voice: "Master, what if only part of the earth be moved?"

"Then," said the giant casually, "you must remain with the larger portion." With a careless blow of his fist, he mashed the flinty hill down over M'lo's shaft, and strode off.

And the years passed, season after season drifting over the prisoner's head, while his fierce spirit raged, so that he began to feel himself injured not only by Belphegor, but by Gri, who had received a healthy child, tough as eel grass, instead of a sickly baby girl. But M'lo never permitted his resentment to interfere

with his escape plans. Constantly he exerted his small mental force, crying soundlessly to all who passed: "Dig in this knoll! Here are minerals—rich, pure ores!" Which was false, for where he fretted in his handful of dirt was merely a crude compound of lead, most plebian of metals.

Meanwhile Gri, after a few experiments in aimless mischief, became strangely intrigued by human thoughts and motives, so that most remarkably for his irresponsible race, he found gratification in guiding the mental growth of an adolescent boy. He became fond of the cold, as a man might develop affection for a puppy. He helped him to grow strong, although the inexperienced little demon was careless with the pituitary gland, overthickening the boy's bones. He smoothed with tender precision hundreds of nerve endings, so that logical thought became easy for his protege. And he did his greatest work, unknowing, by not meddling, as love for his fellow man became the center and balance of the child's whole personality.

There came a time, at last, when men dug into the hill at M'lo's urging, to which they responded subconsciously. And the imp's fettering pound of

impure ore, ground, roasted, smelted, purified, and cast, became an ingot of lead, dully ashine, wherein the demon brooded, thinking of Gri, and bending all his tiny but intense will on revenge.

Men took this ingot, along with many others, melted them again, added more minerals, and brought the molten alloy to a tall, wooden tower. The liquid metal rained down from hundreds of small holes and M'lo was hard put to remain with any of his original handful, for there was great uniformity in the pellets that plunged hissing into cold water at the base of the tower. But Belphegor is not lightly disobeyed, and M'lo finally crouched, shaken and bitter, in a single sphere containing a majority of the ore in which he had been thrust fifty years earlier.

Later, when the lead balls were collected, sorted, and packed, M'lo found himself in a wooden box filled with the greasy castings, and realized the immensity of work still to be done in order to confront his enemy, Gri.

After several more removals, M'lo's box of pellets lay at the bottom of a huge stack of identical containers in a musty warehouse. Nothing could be done from such a base, so the

demon vigorously renewed his efforts. There was an agent who came to the warehouse often for supplies. M'lo began to beam his commands whenever the man was near. The imp who owned this salesman resented such illicit interference, but was unwilling to enter upon a long, tiring mental struggle just to prevent a few moments' dominance by M'lo, whose fierce fixity of purpose over-awed him. Finally, to resolve the situation, he added his powers to those of M'lo, and the box was sent to a store, there to be placed in the forefront of a window display.

For many weary days M'lo languished in the artlessly piled merchandise, his active, malicious mind probing all who came near, seeking news of Gri and the human. Of his fellow imp he heard little, but of Gri's slave there was constant talk, some of which stirred M'lo's hopes.

Finally, in April of a year long to be remembered among humans, M'lo was excited by a stray thought highly significant to his implacable spirit. Exultant, he threw the full current of his power into a single staccato command. The striding man stopped as though reminded of a sudden pressing need. He peered into the window, darkly handsome,

full of sinister notions; and by stepping closer received more of M'lo's passionately throbbing message. The man's own master-demon was away, since it was free to wander, and like all its kind preferred a variety of diversions.

For a heartbeat the man hesitated; then with a suspicious scrutiny of the dusty street, slipped into the store. With keen anxiety M'lo heard the owner, old and tired, languid with April, trying to supply his customer from more accessible stock. M'lo mustered all his seething urgency; the dark, restless purchaser spoke in sharp, imperious tones, and muttering the storekeeper shuffled to the window. His gnarled hand, palsied and careless, actually gripped the box next to M'lo's, and the furious demon wielded a mental lash venomously barbed. The old man winced, shook his head dazedly, and took M'lo's instead. Moments later the buyer was again striding down the street, carrying a carton—and M'lo.

Once at his lodgings, the man exchanged a few words with a querulous old lady, and then retired to open his package. M'lo was at the bottom, but as the handsome head came close, it was easy for him to exert mental control. After

rolling several of the spheres between thumb and forefinger, the man discarded them petulantly, seizing M'lo's. A moment later the ball of metal was rammed into a dark, cold tube. M'lo knew his time would soon come.

All that day the man wandered about, holding brief consultations with other people, all hag-ridden; and finally, well after dark, he proceeded down filthy, ill-lighted streets to a region of brightness and gaiety. Huddled in the metal ball at the end of a hollow cylinder, M'lo nursed his grievance of half a century.

Suddenly he was aware that the warped nerve currents about him were shifting to a new pattern, an unwelcome one. The man was faltering in his resolution; ethical considerations intruded, and there were sharp little pulses of fear as he dwelled upon possible consequences to himself of the contemplated act. There was a brief, terrible fore-vision of an agonizing death, with rough voices crying outside, and the crackle of flames.

M'lo promptly intervened, as well as he could from a point outside the man's skull. Nothing must prevent his rendezvous with Gri. Upon the crazed brain, horribly abused

by the missing imp, he now imposed his own trenchant will, and the man's desperate impulse returned stronger than ever. M'lo sang to him of wrongs righted; of glory; of the end of bloodshed; of the proud envy of men; the warm adulation of lovely women.

They approached a brightly illuminated building, and M'lo exulted, delight surging over him like a hot fragrant tide. Gri was near—and getting nearer every instant. This, he, M'lo had accomplished, and without disobeying Belphegor. He became oblivious to all: their entrance into the building; the faint murmur of a crowd; the stealthy mounting of stairs; the panther stalk outside a wooden door, visited and tampered with earlier that day. He thought only of Gri, and their long-deferred encounter.

Vaguely he knew that his man was stalking another. There was the snick of metal kissing metal. Steel crunched down upon copper. A slow hissing followed. The cap, jarred into reaction, was hurling its lash of flame among the black grains behind M'lo's sphere. The fire surged through and about the refractory particles. A long pause. M'lo danced with impatience, hating his bondage to a bit of

lead. Then one fragment of powder took fire with a reluctant sigh, to be followed by others, all passing the flame along with maddening deliberation. To M'lo, keyed up as he was, everything happened with unbearable slowness; but by human standards the action was almost instantaneous.

His attention shifted to the lead sphere. It creaked loudly in futile resistance to the superheated gas behind. Then, unable to withstand the mounting pressure, it moved languidly through the tube. He heard it grate over a pinch of rust halfway down. It was speeding up now—faster, faster—ah!

Little clicking sounds: the rushing gas carrying grains of powder against human skin. The lead ball thudded on bone. There, it was through! Strong and elastic, the outer membrane stretched miraculously before snapping; then M'lo's sphere, badly distorted, spun into flabby brain tissue. With rainlike patterings, and the slow ooze of serious fluids, the hot mass of deformed metal crashed through the tender organ.

And there, startled and dismayed, was Gri. The two tiny demons, mutually aggrieved met in savage supernatural combat as the man sagged

back in his chair, and a single, low-pitched moan came from the crowd beneath. It was followed by furious cries, rising to the angry roar of a mob out of control. But the two imps paid no attention; their world had shrunk to the dimensions of a human skull, where they fought to the death.

They were still struggling, hours later, with Gri somehow mightier after his strange

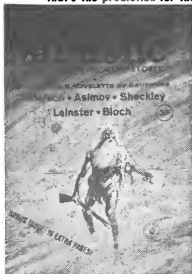
years of self-restraint, prevailing. Suddenly they separated. Almost immortal themselves, they sensed the presence of death, and did him brief homage. Then Gri, madened by the loss of his cherished slave, closed in for the kill.

Both of them were oblivious to a voice outside saying in hushed, shaken tones: "Now he belongs to the ages."

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

An issue that seems guaranteed to be a collector's item—that's the prediction for the July FANTASTIC Stories.



The reason: a literary experiment that will have sf fans talking (if not drooling) for months to come. Five top names — **Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, Bob Sheekley, Murray Leinster, and Bob Bloch**—pool their talents in a literary relay race: a round-robin novelette titled, "The Covenant." Writing in the above-named order, they have handed one another incredible situations which are resolved into a magnificent and moving story.

As if that were not enough, there will also be Part I of a jovial novel by **Jack Sharkey**. "The Crispin Affair" is

about a beautiful girl, a handsome billionaire, and a planet where lightning always strikes twice.

And as if that were not enough, there will be 16—count 'em—16 extra pages! The July FANTASTIC, on sale June 21, will be sold out quickly. Reserve your copy now.

DRIVE OUT OF MIND

By DAN MORGAN

ILLUSTRATED by GRAYAM

*Wherever Preston went, there was
bound to be a girl. Even in the grey
nothingness of hyperspace.*

I STOOD around there in Control with the others; Gill, Flaxman and Young. We had to keep back near the door, out of the way of the scurrying messengers. There was nothing for us to do, but watch the stubby silver image of HD3 on the big screen, and try not to breathe down the necks of the techs who were going through the last preparations before count down.

"You sure missed your chance, Preston." Pete Young nudged my ribs. "Bet you'll take more water with it next time, eh?"

His freckled face grinned up at me, set like a speckled tomato between bulging shoulders.

"I'll do that, Fatso." I wondered if there would be a next time. Maybe I shouldn't

have let Markillie talk me into it.

Christine was working at a panel over the other side of the room. She was quite a chick. Her olive skinned profile set hard with concentration as she noted down the dial readings, but she still looked good to me. I remembered the feel of her short cut, black hair beneath my fingers, soft as cat fur, and the way . . . Hell! there were more important things in life than testing Hyper Drive ships.

There was a shuffling of feet, and everybody in the room snapped to attention as the Old Man walked in. Discipline tends to get a bit sloppy in a place like the Lunar Development Establishment, but not in the presence of the Old



Man. He was the sort of person people naturally jump to attention for.

He stopped in front of me. I felt like a green recruit on his first parade, under the raking gaze of his pale grey eyes.

"They tell me you reported sick, Lieutenant Preston."

"Yes, sir. Just a touch of migraine. I told the MO it was nothing." I felt myself beginning to sweat. It was like lying to God.

"Enough to lose you your pilot's chair on HD3. Nothing less than a hundred per cent fitness is permissible on a test like this." Some of the dried in wrinkles beneath the bush of iron grey hair moved slightly. "Better luck next time, son."

I watched the ramrod straight back as he moved away and felt like all kinds of a louse. Even looking at Christine didn't make me feel any better. I thought of Markillie, lying there in HD3, his body squeezed into a suit that was a mobile bio lab, hooked up to recorders that registered everything from pulse beat to cortical activity. But that was what he had wanted. I never saw anybody so crazy to stick their neck out. Not that any of us were

on the careful side. I mean, all six of us, we volunteered for this thing, didn't we?

Mind you, it looked like a milk run, after HD1 had come back all in one piece. She was an unmanned job, of course. The whole trip took twenty eight hours, and according to the instruments she had been nearly two light years out. The Old Man had done it at last, and the way to the stars was clear, with a Hyper Drive that really worked.

A month later Dashiell went out in HD2. This was going to be the real thing; a test run to Centaurus. It sounded so easy. Just a quick look round the system, then back to Luna. The whole thing shouldn't take more than three days, a week at the outside.

That was three months ago—and he hadn't come back yet.

Well, we told ourselves, there were always risks in that sort of thing. A man could get himself killed walking across the pavement, or falling out of bed, even. So Dashiell had bad luck. That was rough, but the Hyper Drive worked. HD1 had got back all right, and the animals aboard her were alive and kicking. Dashiell had made an error somewhere.

It couldn't happen again—Markillie had nothing to worry about.

"... nine ... eight ... seven ... six ... five ... four ..." Gibson, the chief tech, was giving the countdown.

We all looked at the big screen. Everybody in Control held their breath.

"three ... two ... one ... zero!"

HD3 began to lift slowly, leaving a raging dust storm on the Lunar plain. So far it was the old story, just another ship blasting off, quickening now, until she was merely a speck of silver light which would soon lose itself among the stars.

The big screen blurred, went dead, then brightened again as the camera of an unmanned monitor ship took over, chasing in close beside HD3, giving us a broadside view of her stubby shape.

The Old Man was over by the radio now, with a mike in his hand and earphones clipped over his head. He was talking quietly, but everyone else in the room was so silent that I was just able to hear his last words, husky and strained.

"Right, son, you're clear now. Switch in Hyper Drive ten seconds from ... now! God Bless ..."

He turned his proud old face to look at the big screen. His eyes were very bright.

Everybody in the room was counting silently. Nine ... ten ... The image of HD3 grew in size, so that it seemed to fill the whole screen. Then the picture blanked out, as the monitor ship was destroyed in the backlash of Hyper Drive breakthrough. From now on HD3 and Markillie were on their own. We had no tracing equipment that would follow a ship into hyper space. There was nothing to do now but wait until he broke through again on his return.

We all went along to the Mess after leaving Control. There was even less for spectators to do, now that the screen was blank. And anyway, I for one needed a drink. Gill was looking pretty rough, too. He and Markillie had been buddies ever since they joined the service, and now I supposed he was feeling pretty much out of it.

"Come on, Gill, let's give him a big sendoff. What are you drinking?"

He shrugged my hand from his shoulder as though it was some dirty bug.

"You're supposed to be sick, remember?" He was a good looking kid, with dark wavy

hair, but at that moment he looked about as friendly as a rattlesnake.

"Aw, come on. Loosen up, Mick." Pete Young rolled in between us, cheery as a Christmas morning. "This is a big day for all of us."

"So was the day HD2 blasted off—ask Dashiell." Gill was still looking at me.

"That's not funny." Flaxman, tall, with a chest like a barrel, and a head bald and shiny as an observation dome, cut in, reminding Gill that he had broken one of the prime rules in our profession. When a man is gone and doesn't look like he's coming back, you don't mention him by name, ever. Dead men's names are bad luck. That's how a job like ours made scientifically conditioned, rational minded characters act. Six of us—an exclusive little suicide club. One down—we won't talk about him. Markillie out there now—to come back . . . sometime. Then four to go; myself, Gill, Flaxman and Young, in that order, now that I had missed my turn at second.

Pete Young bought the drinks and handed them round, talking fast and happy. I wondered sometimes whether he was born like that, or whether it was being num-

ber six on the list, and the thought that he would outlive all the rest of us.

I was just putting down my fourth and beginning to feel a cosy glow, when Christine came in the door. She looked pale, and she was walking slowly, as though she was holding herself in check somehow, not looking around her at all. Her withdrawn sadness made her look twice as attractive. If a degree in physics and high ideals hadn't gotten in her way, she would have made a lot of good on TV. She just walked over quietly and sat down at a corner table on her own, looking as though she was getting set for a nice long brood.

I picked a bottle from the bar and a couple of glasses.

"See you later, men." Gill gave me a vicious look, but I winked at the rest of them and walked over to the corner table.

"Well, hello! How's every little thing in the facts and figures department?" I said.

Christine jerked out of her brown study and looked up at me as though she had seen a ghost.

"Harry! But I thought . . ."

I realized that she had been too occupied in Control to notice that I was there with the others.

"No, baby. That was Markillie you gave the big sendoff to." I sat down opposite her and began to pour drinks.

"But why?" There was still something frozen about her—not the way I had planned it at all.

"I was sick this morning. Markillie was the next in line."

"You never had a day's illness in your life."

"Well, it wasn't anything serious; just a kind of headache. You know the way they are on these things. You've got to be on top line, or you're out."

"There was nothing wrong with you last night." Something in her eyes was gradually stripping away the glow I had brought over with me from the bar.

"For Pete's sake! Anybody can get a headache, can't they? It was just bad luck, that's all." I pushed a glass across the table to her, but she ignored it.

"You're not levelling with me, Harry." Her voice was hard.

I should have known she would see through it. Even back in grade school I held the title of being the poorest liar in town. I thought I had grown out of it by now, but

to her I was still just old Glasshead Preston. I moved my chair closer to hers and toned my voice down. There was nobody near, and the crowd over at the bar were getting near the singing stage.

"All right, baby. I'll give it to you straight. This Markillie is a nut—he's got a hero complex a mile wide. Ever since the pilot's rota was posted he's been trying everything he can to jump the order. He just couldn't wait to get out into hyper space. He offered the man a thousand credits to let him take his place on HD2."

"You mean Dashiell?"

I squirmed inside as she mentioned the bad luck name—then it hit me . . . She'd been pretty thick with Dashiell for the week before the test of HD2. It was the big love affair. I remembered Dash, a big blonde character who had probably never lost his heart to anything more human than a football, walking around our quarters like a stunned calf.

"Anyway, when I was notified for HD3 he was onto me day and night, begging me to stand down," I continued. "As next in line he couldn't miss being my replacement. I wouldn't listen to him at first, but these last few days things

have been different. I mean, being around with you and everything . . ." I reached out to take hold of her hand. She snapped it back beneath the table, her whole body recoiling.

"You went yellow, Harry. When it came to the point you didn't have the guts to follow Dashiell out into the unknown."

"Now wait a minute . . ."

"Dashiell was a man, the kind you'll never be," she went on, her eyes wide, nostrils flared. "Do you think he wanted to go out there and risk his life, any more than you did? He was afraid, any sane person would be, but he knew that it was something he had to do. He didn't find some easy way to wriggle out of it, and come making lame excuses. He went out there like a man . . ."

I saw her. For the first time in all those weeks I saw her for what she really was. It was disgusting.

"All right, Christine, you can knock it off now. I get the picture. I took Dashiell's place, didn't I?"

I thought for a moment she was going to spit right in my face. Then she got up from the table and walked out of the room without looking back.

I finished both drinks and poured myself another, wondering which of the two of us disgusted me most. I got the picture all right. It wasn't me she had been interested in—it was the job I was in line for that had attracted her. The pattern was clear—first Dashiell, then me. She only had time for heroes, poor dumb guys who were due to go out and risk their lives. She was a professional pall bearer, a coffin robber—and I had spoiled her kick.

I started work on the bottle seriously. By the time it was three quarters empty I was beginning to surface again. She hadn't been that much of a catch, anyway. But that blonde down in the bio labs, now there was something . . .

Three days, four, five, came and went; each one of them stretching out longer than the next and tightening our nerves along with them. The four of us were never far from Control, always hanging around, waiting for word that would say Markillie was on his way in. I saw Christine often, but she looked through me as though I didn't exist. That was O.K. by me. I was making some time with the blonde, Angie, but my heart wasn't in it. I kept thinking

about Markillie out there—where? Lord! We didn't even know what hyper space looked like. All the cameras on HD1 gave us was a fuzzy blankness.

Things were pretty rugged around the pilots' quarters. Even Pete's grin was getting so that it faded out sometimes, when he thought you weren't looking at him. Flaxman didn't do anything but sit in a corner leafing through one of two books—the Space Manual, or a copy of the Old Testament—rubbing his big hand occasionally across the top of his bald head. Nobody talked much. It wasn't healthy to talk about the thing that was occupying all our thoughts.

Then there was Gill. Markillie had been gone just seven days. I was in the washroom putting the finishing touches on, before going to meet Angie off duty. As I shaved I was figuring that she was a pretty lucky girl. Most chicks go over board for a pilot anyway, even if he looked like Pete, or Flaxman—but with me they really got their money's worth, whichever way you looked at it.

"You yellow livered louse!"

I switched off the razor and turned quickly. Gill was standing there, holding his body in

a half crouch like a tiger about to spring. His lips were drawn back from strong white teeth, and his eyes seemed to have sunk deep into his head.

"Now, take it easy, Mick." I said, putting the razor down warily.

"I ought to slit your throat, you swine. But that would be too easy and quick," he said. He was about my own height, but lithely built. I could give him maybe twenty pounds in weight, but if it came to blows he had one advantage on his side—he was hopping mad.

"Now look, Mick. Let's be sensible about this. What's the beef?" I said, watching the small muscle that twitched at the corner of his mouth.

"You know, pretty boy. You and your women and your booze! I had an idea that there was something phoney about that sick report of yours. Now I know. You faked deliberately, so that Markillie would have to take your place on HD3."

"Who says so?"

"You did, you rat. I've just been talking to Christine. She told me."

I might have known Dracula's daughter had a hand in this somewhere.

"You don't want to believe everything you hear, Mick." I

tried to ease into a smile, but my face seemed frozen.

"You dirty, lying swine. You were sick all right—scared sick to take HD3."

"You've got it wrong, Mick. Markillie begged me to let him go. You know yourself how set he was on playing the hero. I agreed because . . . well I had some heavy commitments to take care of here. You know the way that dame is . . ."

I had made a mistake in mentioning Christine. She and Gill had been getting pretty thick in the last few days. He sprang at me, throwing punches like a windmill, and I fell back against the basin, knocking hair cream, after shave and all the rest of the junk flying. I had just regained my balance and was getting a few hits back at him, when Pete Young and Flaxman came hurrying into the washroom and pulled us apart.

"What's the matter with you two? You gone crazy, or something?" Pete said panting, as he tried to hold the struggling, swearing Gill.

I wiped some blood from the corner of my mouth. "That's all right—a fellow's got to keep in shape up here, what with this low gravity and all. Mick and I were just

trying a few rounds for a workout."

"Better get yourself dressed, Preston." Flaxman looked at me with those sad, preacher's eyes of his. "The Old Man wants all four of us in his office in five minutes."

"Some news of Markillie?" Gill snapped out of his rage and registered interest.

"I don't know," Flaxman said. "The message was all pilots to the CO's office, that's all. The Old Man doesn't waste time with unnecessary explanations."

"At ease, gentlemen." The Old Man said. He seemed to have got smaller and there was the hint of a stoop, as though some of the stiffness had been forced out of his ramrod back.

"Before we go any further I want to tell you that this interview is unofficial." His eyes flickered from one to the other of us. "The whole thing is off the record, and anything you say here will be without prejudice to your records or future in the service. I'm going to be frank with you men, and I'll expect the same from you. You're all volunteers, I know, but the situation has changed. If anyone of you wants to back down after you've heard what I've got to

say, you'll be quite within your rights, Understand?"

We shuffled and nodded. For something to hit the Old Man this hard it had to be rough.

"HD4 is going out tomorrow morning," he said.

There was a sharp intake of breath, then a silence during which the gentle moaning of the air conditioning was audible.

"Then HD3 . . .?" Gill's voice was edgy as he voiced the question that was on all our minds.

The Old Man looked at him, the brown granite of his face softening. "We don't know—we just don't know. But it's been seven days now."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait a while longer?" Flaxman asked.

"Ordinarily, yes. But we don't have the time. If HD4 doesn't go tomorrow, she may never be used. The newscasters back on Earth have got hold of the story, and the opposition moved earlier today to demand all Hyper Drive experimentation be stopped immediately. There's an election coming up soon, and things are pretty shaky for the government already. This issue may break them completely. I've had confidential information that I shall be re-

called to Earth within the next few days to give evidence before the Senate."

We all knew what that could mean to the Old Man. All his life he had worked for the dream of Hyper Drive, expecting the same high standard from others that he set himself. But if the political boys down there got hold of him they would crucify him. On an issue like this somebody's head would have to roll—and he was the obvious candidate.

"That's the position, gentlemen. Sending out HD4 tomorrow is the last chance for the survival of the Hyper Drive project. But I want you to understand that it is entirely up to you. I still have faith that this thing will work, but then I'm not the only one who has to take his life on it." He stopped, drawing a shaky hand across his forehead. "I wish to God I could—but at my age I'd be lucky to survive blastoff. The question is simple—which of you is prepared to take this chance?"

The question hung on the air for a moment, whilst each of us made his own rationalizations. When we first volunteered the Hyper Drive ships had been something new, but they didn't appear so differ-

ent from the ships we had been piloting throughout our careers. Now, with Dashiell and Markillie gone, they seemed like one way tickets to oblivion. No mangled corpses or wrecked ships, just snuffed out of existence as though they had never been. It was something which we could not even begin to understand, and that made it even more horrifying. We could never be blamed for refusing to take such a chance.

And then, as though some invisible drill sergeant had rapped out a command, all four of us took one pace forward. The Psyches had made their selection well when they picked us out of nine hundred volunteers.

The Old Man looked at us for a long time. I thought for one terrible moment that he was going to break down. Then the drill sergeant barked at him too, and he snapped up to attention.

"Thank you, gentlemen." The old fire was back in his eyes. "Now, the next two on the rota are Preston and Gill, isn't that so?" He turned to me. "Are you fit again, Preston?"

"Yes, sir. I told you at the time, it was nothing serious."

He pursed his lips. "I don't

know, Preston. It wouldn't be fair to you and . . ."

"Let me go, sir." Gill moved forward. "Markillie and I graduated together. If there's anything I can do to help him . . ."

"I don't think that's likely," the Old Man said. "So if you've got some idea of locating him in Hyper space I should forget it."

"I understand that, sir," Gill said. "But at least I can help finish the job he was working on. That would be something."

"Yes, Gill, I think you have that right, if that's the way you feel," the Old Man said, quietly.

It was suddenly very important to me that I should be the one to take HD4 out. The things Gill had said to me had bitten deep down. Maybe Christine had just been an excuse I had made to myself, and I was yellow after all. Maybe I had just turned the thing round in my mind to make it look good. Whichever way you looked at it, it had been a rotten deal, and I wanted to straighten things out for my own peace of mind.

"Just a minute, sir. You said yourself that I'm the next on the rota. Don't you think I ought to have the chance to go?"

His pale grey eyes raked me, and for a moment I thought that I had stepped too far out of line.

"All right, lieutenant. You'll get your chance. You can both go—HD4 is going to be a two man job. Even allowing for a high margin of error, it's just not possible that both HD2 and HD3 could have been faulty. I've talked it through with Major Benson of Psyche and he agrees with me that the reason for neither of them returning probably lies in some mental hazard, some danger that could only show up when a hyper drive ship has a human pilot. If that is so, two men will stand a better chance of surviving than one on his own. You and Gill had better go along to the Medic Centre for a checkup right away."

I looked across at Gill. Whatever else this trip was going to be, it would not be a social event.

The next morning I lay in the pilot chair and looked at Gill again. He was in an identical chair by my side—identical save for one thing; the main controls were in front of me. The Old Man had made that quite clear. I was nominally in command. Gill was there to take over if and when

anything happened to me. Until that time he was under my orders.

"How's it going, Mick? I said.

His dark eyes were on me, but he didn't answer. With all the leads from his black suit he looked like some fly that had been trussed by a spider ready for its vampire feast.

"What say we bury the hatchet, eh?" I tried again. "We don't know how long we're going to be stuck in this can."

"Losing your nerve, pretty boy?" His voice grated round the walls of the ship like a knife edge on metal. "Why don't you call the Old Man and tell him you've got another one of those headaches?"

I was just wondering whether I had time to unplug all my suit leads and go over and kick him in the teeth, when the Old Man's voice came on the control panel speaker.

"Hello, Preston, Gill . . . You all right out there?"

"Yes, we're fine, sir."

"Good! Five minutes to blastoff."

"Don't we get a pre-blast-off control check?" I asked.

"That was all taken care of before you boarded," the Old Man answered. "Your recorders should be working now."

"They are," I said, glancing at the panel.

"Then you're all set. We want every bit of data we can get on this test."

If you ever get the recorders back, I thought. How the hell did the Old Man manage to sound so confident?

"I want you to be careful as you can on this," the Old Man said. "You'll be told when to switch into Hyper Drive. The course settings are on the control tape. They will put you in a parabolic trajectory that will bring you back to your point of entry into Hyper Space in exactly one hour. Whatever happens, you must not attempt to break back into normal space before that time, understand?"

"Yes, sir." We had been through the whole thing over and over some fifty times already. Maybe even the Old Man was nervous.

The Controller's voice broke in. "One minute to count down."

"Good luck, men," the Old Man said. "We're all depending on you to bring her back."

You can say that again, I echoed mentally.

Blastoff was a breeze. She lifted sweet as a bird and pointed her nose to the stars. I lay there watching the in-

dicators creep up towards the breakthrough point, answering the Old Man's queries mechanically, whilst I wondered what happened next. It had been a great life so far, but there suddenly seemed an awful lot of things I had never got around to doing. Like that trip down to Florida with Janie. That would really have been something. Janie was a doll. Maybe if I hadn't been crazy enough to stick my neck out by volunteering for this project we would have been there right now, cruising along the coast road, watching the sunlight on the sea and the white sands . . .

"Preston, are you receiving me?" The Old Man's voice broke in on my thoughts.

"Yes, sir."

"Right, prepare to switch into Hyper Drive. Ten seconds from . . . now!"

I reached up and placed my hand on the red lever.

"This is it, Mick. Hold onto the seat of your pants."

He just looked at me. He was a hell of a guy to have around.

"Five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . ."

I slammed the lever down, my whole body shuddering with tension.

And nothing happened. Everything was just as it had

been before with the rumble of the standard drive pervading the ship.

"Hell, it's . . ." My angry howl was cut off as the universe exploded in a flash of white hot flame. I blacked out.

I was at the wheel of my little red Nash sports car, going like a streak along the coast road, feeling the wind tugging at my face and smelling seaweed. Up ahead the road stretched white and straight as an arrow for miles, above the sky was deep blue, with a golden plate of a sun shimmering over to my right. On my left . . .

I looked across. There was Janie. Her dark blonde hair, with the light streaks bleached by the sun, was streaming out behind her. Her face was turned towards me, eyes bright with happiness. Her deep red lips opened in a warm smile.

"Watch the road, Harry!" she shouted.

I nodded, and looked ahead. As I did so, memory hit me. A few seconds before I had been lying in the pilot chair of HD4. It just didn't make sense . . . Or did it? We were playing around with the very structure of space time with Hyper Drive, out in a dimly understood territory. Maybe

this was the reason that the other two ships had not come back; the Hyper Drive field did have a special effect on humans, shuttling them about in time, or perhaps even into another probability pattern. Somewhere out there beyond moon all three HD ships were still moving in Hyper Drive, pilotless, while the men who should have been aboard them were elsewhere in space and time. No wonder they had never come back.

HD1 had been different. Because the field had no effect on automatics, just on flesh and blood pilots. This was what Benson, the Psyche had been guessing at. After all the sweat and tears the Old Man's Hyper Drive ships had turned out to be something equally wonderful, but unintended . . . *time machines.*

There was one flaw. If I was here, where was Mick Gill? He had been lying right there beside me in HD4 and now he was . . . where? If I had been shuttling back or forward in time it was logical to expect that he would be with me now. If logic, ordinary everyday logic, worked in this kind of crazy setup.

I decided I had to settle down somewhere and think this thing out. I began to ease the car to a halt.

"I knew you'd stop here." The shimmer of the sun on the sea was reflected in Janie's eyes. "All that wonderful, cool water." A tiny frown flickered across her face. "But where does a good girl change into her bathing suit?"

The beach stretched for miles either side of us, without even the shade of a pebble.

"All right, baby. I'll go count a few grains of sand," I said, getting out of the car. "Just give me a call when you're decent."

I walked off the road, feeling the hot stuff yielding beneath my feet. This was just the excuse I needed to get away on my own for a few minutes. A few minutes—that was a laugh! I was going to figure out a problem like this one in a few minutes? Perhaps the best thing to do would be to go right back to town and make contact with the authorities. I might somehow be able to convince them that I was not a raving nut—and then, if I could get a communication link with STRADE on moon and talk to the Old Man. If STRADE and the Old Man existed in this world . . .

It was no good just standing there thinking round in

circles, I had to find out for sure. Janie would have to wait for her swim. I was just about to turn and walk back to the car when I heard something that stopped me dead.

"Preston—is that you?" The voice was Gill's.

I looked around me. The car was on the road, some thirty yards away—all around me there was nothing but bare sand. And yet Gill's voice had been so close that he might have been at my side.

"Yes—where are you?" I asked.

"Right here." His voice was so close.

There was still no sign of Janie by the car. That was good. She would think I had completely flipped, standing there talking to thin air.

"I don't get it, Mick. Here's me pushed around in time and you invisible. It doesn't make sense."

"You big dumb ox! So you think you're a time traveler?"

"Sure . . . what else could explain all this?"

"Close your eyes," he ordered.

I did. With my eyelids closed I could see the beach, the sea and the sunlight, just as plainly as with them open.

"You mean this whole thing is a . . . ?"

"You hit it, bright boy—an hallucination," Gill said. "I don't know where you think you are, but I'm sitting in the library of a house back in Boston."

"But this is all so real. I mean, there's Janie back there in the car, large as life . . ."

"There had to be a woman in it for you, didn't there?" Gill sneered. "You've got a mind like an ape in mating season."

I stooped down and let a handful of sand run through my fingers.

"No, Mick. I can't buy it. I'll agree the business about the transparent eyelids is crazy, but this is all so real. I can feel everything I see—touch it, smell it."

"All right, Preston. If you've got to have it the hard way." I stood there waiting for maybe a half minute in silence—then an invisible hand slapped my face.

"Did I hit you?" asked Gill, as I reeled back.

"You sure did. But what's that supposed to prove, except that you still haven't forgotten that row in the washroom?"

"God! When it comes to anything but women you're an unimaginative slob, aren't

you? Can't you see that although neither of us can see the other, *we are still lying side by side in HD4?*"

"Here's Janie coming out of the car. I can see her," I said.

"Then turn your back on her and think about something else. She's only a figment of your imagination, I tell you."

"Some figment!"

"Look, Preston, be serious for once in your fool life." Gill's voice was higher in pitch now. The strain was beginning to tell. "We're lying here in the ship, blind to our true surroundings, each of us stuck in his own subjective world of hallucination. You've got to believe that."

"O.K., Mick. If you say so." I was deliberately clowning. I had to get back at him for that slap in the teeth somehow. His explanation fitted a lot better than mine. A side effect of Hyper Drive that turned the human mind in on itself and blanked out true perception.

"All right, so how are we going to get back?" Gill said. "That's what we've got to figure out, and quickly. There's a clock on the wall of this room I'm in, and it's already ticked away twenty minutes. There's no way of telling whether or not that means

anything, but if we're ever going to get back, we've got to find a way of breaking these hallucinations, so that we can handle the ship."

He was right—we didn't have much time. If we missed breakthrough point we might never find our way back to moon. I tried to visualize the control panel, but the sand and sea seemed so much more real. I reached out my hand, but felt only thin air. That was the trouble with this hallucination. How could I know whether I was really reaching out my hand, or just kidding myself in my mind that I was doing so?

Then I had an idea.

"Say, Mick, how would it be if we tried to place ourselves in the same sort of position as we should be on the ship?"

"I did that already. I'm in an easy chair right now. Before you spoke I had been trying to get back, but my surroundings here still persisted."

"I'll give it a try. Maybe my lack of imagination will be an asset for once, huh?" I sat myself down in the warm sand and closed my eyes, trying to visualize myself back in the cabin of HD4 as I remembered it.

It was no good. The vision

of the sunlit beach still persisted. I tried again, attempting a deeper concentration. Holding my breath I began to count backwards from a thousand. Gradually, as the pressure in my lungs built up I began to feel something solid pressing in on the contours of my body; something that could be the form hugging moulding of the pilot chair. Visually I was still there on the beach, but I reached up my hands and felt my helmet there, smooth and solid.

"What are you doing, Preston," Gill said.

The air exploded from my lungs and the helmet seemed to dissolve beneath my fingers.

"Shut up, blast you!" I gasped. "I was just getting somewhere."

"You're sure?" Gill's voice was eager, on the point of hysteria. "Preston, for God's sake! Don't fool around."

"Keep quiet, and I'll try again," I said.

This time the impression was stronger. Soon I could feel myself physically back in the chair on HD4. The lying vision of the beach was still being fed into my optic nerves by the hallucination circuit in my mind, but I could grasp the sides of the chair with my

hands. Through it I could sense the vibration of the drive, and as I held on the sound of the breakers faded into the rumble of the ship's engines.

I allowed myself to breathe again, and the sensory impressions remained. Reaching up with my hand I groped in front of me. It came into contact with cold metal.

"I made it, Mick. I'm here now, touching the control panel. I can't see it, but it's there! How is it with you?"

"I can't get a thing," Gill said. "My surroundings here are as solid as ever."

My fingers played over the control panel, trying to correlate memory and touch.

"I think I've found the hyper drive lever," I said. "I'm going to try to break-through."

"No! Think what you're doing, Preston! "Gill's voice was scrappy with terror. "We don't know how long we've been out here. If you go through into normal space now, we might be half a light year from base. We'd never get back alive!"

"So what do you suggest we do—just sit here and wait until we starve to death, or the drive overloads and blows us to hell?"

"At least let's talk it over."

"What is there to talk about?" I asked. "The way I see it, we have no choice. We don't know how long we've been in hyper drive, agreed, but shall we know any better by waiting? If we come out a long way from home, then we'll have to try again. But at least we'll be doing something."

"All right, Preston," he said, at length.

My hand tightened on the hyper drive switch.

"I'm ready, Harry!" called Janie's voice behind me.

Everything in me wanted to turn round and look at her. I must be mad, cutting this switch might kill both of us. Wouldn't it perhaps be better to go on enjoying this happy world of hallucination as long as it would last? The pull on the lever might mean instant oblivion—surely life, even in a dream, was better than that?

Close by me I could hear Gill's voice mumbling a prayer. What about him? Would he be content to live out his existence in that mental library of his?

But it wasn't just a question of Gill or me; there were the others — Dashiell, who must be dead now, Markillie, and the Old Man. If I was

content to lie here like a vegetable for the rest of my life, all they had done would be in vain. I had to take some action, even if it meant isolation a billion miles from Earth, and a slow death from starvation and thirst.

"I'm cutting the drive," I said.

Gill's mumbling stopped.

My hand moved forward, pressing the switch over as far as it would go, my whole body tensed ready for the expected wrenching agony of breakthrough.

I was still on that cursed beach. The white sand was all around me, throwing back the heat of the sun blindingly in my eyes.

"Harry, what are you waiting for?" shouted Janie.

"For God's sake, Preston! What are you waiting for?" screamed Gill. "Pull the switch, if you're going to."

"I just did," I said. Maybe it was a time lag like the one when we went into Hyper Drive. Any second now that white hot flash of light would come.

I waited. Eons of subjective time dragging by on leaden feet. But still nothing happened. Perhaps I had pulled the wrong switch, or perhaps the beach around me

was real, and the idea that I was on HD4 was the hallucination. Nothing was certain.

Gill had cracked completely. Close by I could hear him babbling and screaming in a delirium of maddened terror. I could imagine him threshing in his chair like some panic stricken, trapped animal. He would keep that up now, until he finally retreated into the merciful oblivion of catatonia.

And me . . . My mind felt like a racing, ungoverned wheel that must eventually reach a speed at which it will disintegrate.

I scrambled forward over the control panel, pulling switches in blind desperation. At last I slumped back in the chair again, aware that the control panel was completely dead. Even if I could banish the hallucination, I would still be unable to pull HD4 back into normal space. Gill and I were condemned to spend the rest of our lives in this madman's dream.

Then suddenly I was fighting for my life. Gill's body landed on top of me, and I could feel his spittle on my face as he screamed his loathing.

"You're the one! This is all your fault, Preston. You swine! You planned this from

the beginning. But you're not going to get away with it . . ."

His hands were tearing at my suit with a madman's strength, as he searched blindly for my throat.

Even in that hopeless situation the will to live in me made me fight back. I smashed my fist forward into the clear air of the beach and it connected with something yielding. Gill grunted. I hit again, and felt my knuckles crunch on bone. Then, grabbing at his unseen shoulders I heaved.

I heard him slump to the floor, the disconnected leads of his suit rattling, then lay back panting for breath on the sand. Perhaps, if he was lucky, I had killed him. If not, he would be back again when he recovered consciousness, and we would fight again like two maddened rats in a pitch black hole.

Until then, there was nothing I could do but wait to die.

"Come on, Harry." I looked up into Janie's smiling face. She was wearing a pale blue bikini, and her skin was the colour of apricots. "If you don't get changed I'm not going to wait for you any longer. What's the idea of

sitting there like a bump on a log, anyway?"

I struggled to my feet. This wasn't true, any of it, but it was better than just waiting. Perhaps I *could* live a lifetime here in this world of my own making. Now that Gill was gone, there was no one to intrude and break the illusion.

I stepped forward, reaching out my arms to hold her. But she slipped away laughing, and began to run towards the creamy surf. I stumbled after her, my body heavy with fatigue.

The water was lapping, shinning about her calves now as she stood ready to plunge forward into the waves.

"Janie!" I shouted.

The universe dissolved in a tearing horror of white hot agony.

I crawled back to consciousness, unwilling, but dragged onwards by the unreasoning urge to survive. The beach was gone.

I was sitting in the pilot chair of HD4, wrapped in the tattered remnants of my suit. The control panel, its settings crazily jumbled, was in front of me. Gill lay on the deck at my feet, his face deathly pale, a trickle of blood running from his

broken mouth. He was still breathing.

"Hello, Preston . . . Gill! Are you receiving me?" The voice of the Old Man came from the control panel speaker.

I stared at it dully for a moment, wondering if this was yet another trick played on me by my crazed mind.

"Hello, HD4 . . . Answer me!" called the Old Man.

I watched the forward viewscreen numbed, uncomprehending. The image of moon was there, growing visibly.

"Preston here, sir," I said, at last.

"Thank God!" breathed the Old Man. "And Gill?"

"He'll be all right, but he's in bad shape," I said, glancing down at the still form.

"Good! Well hold on, Preston. You should be touching down in about ten minutes."

I looked at the control panel. "I can't land this thing. I've no controls."

"Don't worry about that, Preston. You're on robot pilot. You have been since blastoff."

"You mean this panel never was connected?" I remembered the strange time lag between my switching over and the ship actually breaking through into hyper drive . . . and the way the Old Man had brushed aside my query about a pre-blast-off check.

"No, Preston. I'm sorry we had to deceive you about that. But the Psyches thought it best that you should believe you were in control. We really relied on the same type of automatics that brought HD1 back. You and Gill were along to find out just what the effect was that stopped Dashiell and Markillie bringing their ships back."

"I think we can answer that question . . . sir," I said. It had been a dirty deal, in a way. But I was prepared to forgive him that much.

THE END





DAVID'S DADDY

By ROSEL GEORGE BROWN

ILLUSTRATED by GRAYAM

*For one child, a fate worse than
death. For the other, a fate
worse than life.*

MISS FREMEN was a good teacher. Had been for twenty years. She taught fourth grade the year I started teaching. I had fifth grade. I came to her with my problems, which were many and unbearable, at least it seemed so to me.

"What do you do," I asked

her despairingly as we stood monitoring the dusty playground during recess, "about going to the bathroom? I mean, one starts and then they *all* want to go. I know they all don't *have* to go, but they say they do. And if I don't let anybody go, there's liable to be an accident. And they're all tak-

ing advantage of me. I know they are."

Miss Fremmen's wrinkles gathered into a smile for me. The faintly suspicious smile, the not altogether committal smile teachers cultivate.

"The very first day of class I tell them," she said, drawing herself up to a state of forthright dignity to illustrate how she told them, "little people, I can *tell* when you really have to go to the bathroom and when you don't. So I warn you, I just *warn* you not to ask to be excused unless it's urgent." Miss Fremmen stood there frozen for a moment, clad in what had every appearance of an armored corset under her thin summer voile, her face square and omniscient, her hair kinky, spatulate, and slightly burned from a recent permanent.

"How marvelous!" I sighed. "But Miss Fremmen, I wouldn't dare try it. I've got a weak face." I didn't say it, but I thought that the corset had a lot to do with it, too. And if I tried to wear a corset I'd have to hold it on with scotch tape.

"Oh, now it's not *weak*," Miss Fremmen said sympathetically, the words scratching grandly over the ancient grate in her throat. You have to talk loud on the playground to be heard at all. "You just haven't

learned to frown right. When I was in Normal School we learned how to teach before we graduated. Nowadays they don't teach you anything practical. It's not your fault, Lillian," she went on, grating more gently, "they closed up all the Normal Schools. But you'll learn. Don't worry."

The bell rang, as it always does in the middle of conversations, and we went on up. Paralyzed with admiration, I watched her fourth grade marching silently into the room next to mine. The cadence was perfect. No face was sullen. No face rebellious. Miss Fremmen's wrinkles dropped into a wink for me, and she closed her door silently. My door creaked noisily as I herded in two thirteen-year-old stragglers, both a head taller than me. Then, practicing my Frown, I went about the room collecting the post-recess tribute of marbles, gum, rubber bands, paper clips and an occasional frog. Miss Fremmen, I thought enviously, had probably not had a problem in fifteen years. No one would *think* of chewing gum or clinking marbles or shooting paper clips in *her* class.

But I was wrong about the problem. I noticed her going about with a worried frown

after a few weeks. No one else noticed it, because a worried frown differs only in very subtle ways from a natural, authoritarian frown. But I had made a special study of Miss Fremen, particularly of her facial expressions, and I knew something was wrong.

"Lillian," she told me one day when it was our turn to supervise the playground again. "I've been a teacher a long, long time." She was breathing in the dust like the purest mountain air, and her eyes darted around, from plain habit, so that no corner escaped her. She frowned. "I don't like that Sansoni boy talking to those third graders," she said. She collared a passing pupil. "Go tell Billy Sansoni I said to play by the big boys." She turned to me. "Billy's going to be just like his daddy." She shook her head fatalistically. "Bad blood in the family."

"What were you going to say before?" I asked. I was anxious to know what sort of problem could possibly beset a teacher like Miss Fremen. It had to be a school problem. Miss Fremen didn't have any other life.

"Oh," she said, the worried frown replacing the authoritarian frown, "a very funny thing. Peculiar. In all the

years I've been teaching there's never been anything like it. I really ought to tell Mr. Buras. But I don't know. He's a fine principal and a fine disciplinarian, even if he's not allowed to spank any more. But he's not a man to understand anything that's, you know, peculiar."

"Yes?" My curiosity was becoming more vulgar all the time, but I tried to keep it out of my voice.

"You remember that conversation we had back when the term opened? About how to keep the children from making a game out of asking to be excused?"

"I remember it vividly," I answered.

"Well, there's one little boy in my room. Jerome. He's from one of those migratory families. Oil fields or fruit picking. I'm not sure which. This Jerome. I *can* tell when he has to go to the bathroom."

"Well," I said, feeling sort of let down, "that's not very surprising. After all, when you've been around children for so long, little things like their facial expression and their tone of voice . . ."

"Um!" Miss Fremen said emphatically. "No. You don't understand. You see . . . *Get* off those bars, Emanuel. Those

are for the swings. You'll kill yourself and I'll get blamed." Emanuel slid down swiftly.

"I know it before he says anything," Miss Fremmen went on. "He'll be just sitting there, bent over his workbook. One day I told him, 'All right, Jerome, you may be excused.' And then the children called it to my attention that he hadn't asked to be excused."

"But he went?"

"Oh, yes. He had to."

"Maybe your imagination," I said, coughing from the dusty air. "After all, they always welcome the chance to get out of the room."

"I've been teaching twenty years," Miss Fremmen said indignantly. "I don't *have* any imagination."

I didn't know whether to grin or not, so I didn't.

"And it isn't only that. You know, they changed the work books last year and there are a few things that have different answers now than they did when I was a girl, and several times Jerome has given *my* answers, and how would he know . . ."

At that moment the bell rang and I didn't think much more about it, being busy keeping my class in line and being annoyed with Jerry Dufossat, who was leering at me with gum in his mouth.

It was that afternoon we had the bomb scare. It is also one of the few times in my life I've been left absolutely alone with a decision, and done the unobvious thing, because it was such a terrible chance to take.

You know, teachers do a lot of things beside teach. And we have to worry about a lot of things besides whether Johnny can read.

One of the things we have to worry about is the children's safety. And for that, one of the last things in the world we want to see is a strange man hanging around the school yard.

Well, I saw one, that lunch hour, but he just walked around the block and watched the children and didn't try to talk to them or come into the school yard, so I just kept an eye on him. He was a slouched, dull-eyed man, and he looked so much like a degenerate character I decided he must be an actor practicing.

The second time he came around the block I went over and asked if he were the father of one of the children in the school yard.

"Yeah," he said, pointing indeterminately, and slouched on.

He smelled like liquor. But

sometimes it's cough syrup and he *did* have a cough. A hack, now and then, like a comment on whatever dreary thoughts such a man must have.

The more I thought about it, the more I thought I'd better call him back and tell him to take his postprandial strolls somewhere else, because teachers have to be *very* nervy, but just then the bell rang—and you can't imagine how many problems are solved, or never get solved, because bells ring.

Well, I was thinking I'd better send a little note to Mr. Buras but first I had to collect the impedimenta the kids had left on the playground—the latest thing was pornographic telescopes—and then we had arithmetic which is always a strain on me because I've never really adjusted to the fact that $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} = \frac{1}{2}$.

Anyway, by two o'clock I was just getting around to the note and had five fraction problems on the board for the children to do—when the door opened and in he walked.

I didn't like the way he walked.

Nor the way he looked.

Cough medicine, to my knowledge, does not produce this effect.

"He's drunk," someone whispered.

"Nah, crazy," someone else whispered and I gave them my Look which, after several months, was really getting rather good.

It's too bad fifth grade children know what drunkenness is. But they do, you know. You have to resign yourself to all sorts of things about children.

I gave the man my Look, too, and he appeared very ill at ease, because sometimes even grown people feel overawed when they walk into a school. Especially the kind of grown people who used to get called to the principal's office all the time.

"I come," he began, and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. "Come for my son."

I looked around the room. There was David Mines, a shy child strung too tall for his weight, sitting immobile. Only tears moved in his eyes. That would be the one.

"School is not out until three o'clock," I said. "Unless there is some unusual reason I cannot let David go." Normally, of course, I wouldn't even question a parent coming for a child early. But not with that expression on David's face.

"Got a reason," Mr. Mines said. "My boy. *David!*" he

called to the boy. But he was unsure of himself. He was a man used to being pushed around. It was obviously hard for him to stand on his own two feet.

Literally and figuratively.

"Sit down, David!" I said peremptorily. A thought was coming to me with cold horror. And it was such a bad thought I tried to hide from it. But I could not.

"Sit down, please, Mr. Mines," I continued, in the same tone I used with David. "In the last desk on the row next to the windows." Because I recalled the recent case of the man who set off a bomb in a school yard. And although everybody did what they could and did what was to be expected and the school authorities were not to be blamed—well, perhaps it might be better in such a case not to do what was to be expected.

Like . . . like what?

Of course, I had no real reason to think Mr. Mines had set a bomb anywhere. Maybe he'd just come to take David for a dental appointment and what with the cough medicine and my authoritative attitude, he was too confused to say so.

On the other hand, I could feel there was something odd about the whole thing.

The proper thing to do was send the man to Mr. Buras.

In which case Mr. Buras would see only two choices. Put the man out, by force if necessary, if he seemed dangerously drunk, or take David out of school and make him go with his daddy. And why not, except for my intuition?

Mr. Mines sat there, overflowing the little desk, his feet shifty, some internal discomfort making a line between his brows.

"Please wait a few moments, Mr. Mines. We have our spelling lesson now and it's very important that David should not miss it. Children, get out your spellers."

We had had our spelling lesson, of course, at eleven o'clock in the morning.

Not a child betrayed me. The room was silent as the grave.

"Page thirty-four," I said. And the monotonous chant began. "Desert. D-E-S-E-R-T." What was I going to do? What was Mr. Mines thinking, sitting there? If only I could read his . . . Jerome!

SEND ME JEROME, I wrote on a slip of paper.

"Who's the messenger for today?" I asked, as casually as possible, between Government and Guide.

Joyce stood up, her light-

boned face a little pink with excitement, but shoulders square and fully up to whatever responsibility I was going to put on her.

Mr. Mines was looking suspiciously at the note.

"It's for Miss Fremen in the fourth grade," I told Joyce, loud enough for all to hear. "Tell her it's for the book lists."

Miss Fremen might well wonder what Jerome had to do with the book lists. But Miss Fremen was not one to waste time satisfying idle curiosity on a busy school day.

"L-A-U-G-H, laugh!"

Mr. Mines didn't have anything with him that looked like a bomb. But it would have been easy enough for him to sneak a suitcase in when classes were going on after lunch and hide it somewhere. In a lavatory or a broom closet.

I could just let him take David out and have the school searched. But suppose it was where no one could find it?

Or I could ask Mr. Buras to clear the school. On what grounds? That David's daddy looked like a bum? In this neighborhood a good third of the daddies looked like bums. Hell, they *are* bums. Mr. Buras couldn't clear the school every time one of them came

around—not that these kind of daddies make a habit of coming around.

Mr. Mines was watching the clock, his face silvery with perspiration where the sun caught it. Every time the clock hand jumped another minute Mr. Mines passed his hand over his forehead.

"Spelling lesson's over," he said, when we got to "yule." He stood up uncertainly. "C'mon, David."

"David may not be excused yet," I said firmly. "We have to make a sentence with each of the words."

Mr. Mines stood there, awkward, by the little desk. "Then I'll have to leave without him."

Why not?

The room was so quiet you would have thought all the children had stopped breathing at once.

"Thunk!" went the minute hand of the clock.

"You may not be excused," I snapped, sure this would not work, wondering where I got that kind of nerve.

Mr. Mines sat back down, his eyes dull. "Yes, ma'm," he said. Then he looked at the clock and stood up again. "How long?" he asked, and he wiped at the ledge of his mouth.

"Half an hour," I said. I

gripped the end of a ruler tightly in my right hand and stood in front of the class, tapping the ruler into the palm of my left hand. "Delia," I said, "make a sentence with 'automatic' showing you know what the word means."

"Thunk!" went the minute hand of the clock as Delia stood up and the class waited for her somewhat ponderous mind to get into action.

Where was Jerome?

"Half an hour's too long," Mr. Mines said.

"Automatic," said Delia slowly, "we have an automatic defroster on our refrigerator."

"Um," I said. "You used the word right, but can someone else give us a sentence to show what the word means?"

Several hands went up.

Mr. Mines was edging across the back of the room.

Where was Jerome?

"Just a moment," I said, slapping the ruler hard against my palm.

"Have to get out of here," he said. But he was edging slowly, moving his feet carefully, as though he thought this was making him invisible.

"Please stay where you are a moment," I said. "Emily, let us hear your sentence."

"An automatic dishwasher

washes the dishes by itself without you having to do anything," said Emily with her usual prim correctness. Emily always wore starched plaid dresses with little white collars, and I couldn't help wondering if this were not what made her right all the time.

"Very good," I said. "The 'auto' part of the word means 'self.' Like an automobile is something that runs by itself, instead of having to be pulled by horses." I hunted around in my distracted mind for other "auto" words suitable for the fifth grade.

"Thunk!" went the clock.

The door clattered, creaked and opened, and in came Joyce leading Jerome. Joyce carefully closed the door behind her and led Jerome to where I was standing in front of the blackboard.

What now?

Gerald had his hand up, swelling out of his desk with eagerness. Poor Gerald so seldom knew anything at all that whenever his hand was one of the raised ones, I called on him. "Yes, Gerald?"

"An autocrat," he said, triumphantly remembering from the morning spelling lesson, "is a man who is king all by himself instead of having a president and senators."

Jerome just stood there.

Wondering, no doubt, what forgotten misdemeanor on the playground I might want to scold him about.

I wondered what it was I had expected him to do about Mr. Mines.

"Jerome," I said, taking him by the shoulders and turning him to face the back of the room, "this is David's daddy, Mr. Mines."

Puzzled, Jerome looked.

Mr. Mines was at the door, his hand on the knob, his face pale and frightened.

"Thunk!" went the clock.

Suddenly I could feel Jerome's little body grow taut under my hands, and he looked around at me with bottomless eyes.

"It's going to blow up," he said, "when the hands are like *that*." And he made two-thirty with his arms.

I swallowed and looked around at the clock.

"Thunk!"

Two twenty-five.

"Bang!" went the door. It was Mr. Mines, gone.

And Jerome and I were alone with it. We were the only ones who really *knew*.

"Monitor!" I said, and Gerard marched up and came to the front of the class.

"Messenger!" I said, and Delia marched up. "Get Mr. Buras immediately."

I brought Jerome outside the room and closed the door behind me. It was too late to try to catch Mr. Mines. It was too late for almost anything. It was all up to Jerome, now.

Through the glass topped door I could see David with his head down on his desk, quietly sobbing. He didn't know about the bomb. But he knew about his daddy. And now everyone else did, too.

"Thunk!" went the clock in the hall.

"Where is it, Jerome?"

"A dark place," he said.

"A little place."

I ran down the hall to the broom closet.

Mr. Buras came out of his office with Delia.

"Go back into the room, Delia," I said. "*Run*."

She ran.

"There's a bomb in the school," I said. "I'm finding it now. We have four minutes."

"I'll fill a washtub with water," he said, "while I get the kids out and call the police."

There was no time to find out how I knew or if I was crazy.

He looked into the seventh grade room and called out three of the big boys.

He rang the bell for fire

drill. But there wouldn't be time. Time. I hoped my class would know enough to follow Miss Fremmen's and get out safely without me.

Jerome and I ran to the little room where old books and the movie projector are kept. He shook his head.

"Which way?" I asked.

He didn't know. Only he would know the room if he saw it.

I waved my class toward Miss Fremmen's room as they came filing out. One look and she took them over.

Small, dark room. Jerome and I ran down the stairs to the boys' lavatory. He shook his head.

Girls lavatory.

No.

Dear God!

We rushed in and out of cloak rooms.

No.

No.

No.

"Jerome," I said. "You've got to. What else besides small, dark room?"

"Scared. Very scared.

"Of course. What else?"

"No. Scared of a whipping. Scared of God."

"Scared of . . ." I dragged Jerome into Mr. Buras' office. "Surely not here? And it isn't small and dark."

"Almost," said Jerome,

"This is how it feels, but this isn't where it is."

I looked around the office. So bare and clean. No big, empty boxes with small, dark places in them.

"The john!" I cried, for there is a little men's room attached to the principal's office. I yanked open the door.

"Yes!" said Jerome. "Oh, quickly!"

Yes, but where? Such a bare, clean little room. He must have slipped in during lunch hour, probably even before I saw him hanging around the playground.

Where? Just walls, the wash basin—the radiator! It was too warm a day for the heat to be on and perhaps there was room behind—there it was!

"Run, Jerome," I cried, and I edged the thing out carefully. It was a briefcase affair, with one broken handle. A sad, forgotten briefcase.

But Jerome didn't run. He hung on to the back of my skirt and followed me into the teachers' washroom where I could hear the wash tub filling up.

I threw the briefcase into the wash tub, and splashed water all over Jerome and me, and I pulled him out of the room and closed the door be-

hind me and sat down in the middle of the hall and had hysterics.

Mr. Buras was there and it was a while before I realized he had two asperin tablets and a glass of water for me.

"Thank you," I said. "Oh, dear God."

"Come in my office and sit down," Mr. Buras said. "The police will be here any minute. Maybe they can catch him. If you can describe him."

I stood up as best I could, ashamed of having broken down in front of Jerome. Children are terribly frightened when grown people lose control.

We walked through the hollow school, so strange with all the children outside. I looked down at Jerome. Those eyes! I thought of the things he must know, with that reaching mind of his. He knew. He knew the most frightful thing there is to know in the whole world. That there is nobody,

nobody at all who is sure about anything. Children should not have to know this thing.

"Can you describe him? Do you know who it was?"

I paused, passing the door of my room, for something caught my eye through the glass.

It was David, his head still in his arms, all alone, waiting for the fire to come. So many things were worse than death.

"It was . . ." Why did I have to be the one to tell? Why was this responsibility mine?

I looked at Jerome. His, too. So many responsibilities would be his.

"It was David's father," I said, and I went in to David.

Maybe there would be some assurance I could give David.

But not Jerome.

For he would know assurance was not mine to give.

Nor anyone else's.

THE END





Someone dashed the hemlock cup from his hands in the very act of his drinking. But it seems that Socrates was not fated to live anyway, anytime.

NO END OF TIME

By PHYLLIS GOTLIEB

THE costume Krisomer provided me with for the great occasion was a complicated arrangement of drapes and folds in blue woven fabric. I believe it was made of animal hair. Ugh. It was absolute perfection in the matter of heat and itchiness, and aesthetically it may well have suited that female of the species for whom it was originally designed. In the Old-Civ gallery of the Museum there is an extremely ancient and crumbling statue called *Girl in a Peplum*, but her rather stunned expression (her nose is mashed in) doesn't tell whether she liked what she was wearing.

The five men of the dekad had even more idiotic swathes about their bodies, gathered in sweltering bunches over

the left shoulder and leaving the right side naked. If these Old-Civ people had any greatness it was not in their fashions. The last time I had worn anything at all was at a trial two hundred and seventy-three years ago, and I felt something of that oppressive ceremonial atmosphere now. But it was Krisomer's big hour, and we didn't grumble.

Draco met us at the Museum entrance, and I groaned to myself. He's not a bad dekurion, and I've loved him from the day, long ago, when he took us all home red and squalling from the crèche, but his presence meant that Krisomer planned to make a big thing out of this foolish affair. Draco is a little shorter and thicker than the usual Omeggan, and by that much the

more anxious to raise the perfect dekad. And Krisomer is Draco's favorite dekalian, a Specialist in both of Draco's prime enthusiasms: Old-Civ and the Chronotome. Now we were to have the ultimate in Entertainments combining both of them.

Draco turned to Krisomer with a glint. "No dead dinosaurs this time, Krisomer?"

Krisomer reddened; Magger snickered and did a little dance on the floorstream. "Fine lively entertainment," he said.

That had been Krisomer's first attempt to bring across a live organism. The tons of swiftly decaying organic matter only took a few hours to clean up, but it eventually overloaded the disposit, and after that the ventilators. We were punished with a year out of stasis that left all ten of us haggard and almost insane with boredom; it was fifteen years before Krisomer dared bring anything out of the Chronotome again, and he perfected himself on mineral specimens for ten years even before he timidly tried out a few butterflies. At least, I hoped he'd perfected himself.

The floorstream carried us gliding down the long halls, and our pale draperies flared

and caught the air. I have read of beavies of swans . . .

This is a marvelous specimen," said Draco. "What's his date?"

"About Civ 4000," said Krisomer, adding modestly, "of course I have him exactly pinpointed."

"Of course."

"Of course," said Magger, "indeed, naturally," and there was a faint ripple of appreciation at the scope of his wit. I imagine this is Magger's Specialty. I've never seen evidence of any other.

I turned my eyes to the specimen.

He was sitting on air, but not exactly.

"I froze him in a time-block," Krisomer explained, "until we could decide what to do with him." We flattened our noses against the force-field, and the great walls of the Time-Chamber fell away shadowed beyond us.

Krisomer had told us that nearly all species of Old-Civ Man was extremely short, squat, and hairy, but I think the one in the block was extreme even among them. He was sitting on space at eye level above the housing of the machine, cross-legged, grey-haired, wrapped about in swathes of white woven fabric much the same as ours.

The hair on his arms and what I could see of his legs was almost as thick as our head hair, but it was dark. On his head and jaw it was animal-thick, nearly as white as ours. His nose was very flat across the saddle for Old-Civ, perhaps it had been broken. His skin was clean except on the soles of his feet where dust had become permanently ingrained in the texture. There were rings of red on his ankles; I still see them clearly in my memory.

"Why are you looking so glum, Ashael?" Draco asked me.

"She's jealous," said Magger, really frothing himself beneath his bright surface, and Krisomer turned to me reproachfully because I alone had not praised him. But I shook my head. The truth is I was bored, and a little uneasy that we were bringing an Old-Civ man warm and alive into the life of Omega.

He was so still and expectant. The hairy hands were held near his face, cupping some invisible memory he touched his lips against. I know a little bit about Old-Civ too, and I said, "He was holding a container, a cup, what they drank from then. You've cheated him of his drink, Krisomer."

"I'll get him another," said Krisomer, "as soon as I find out what was in it."

"Well, come on then," said Berlain, and Krisomer turned to me again. I wished he'd keep his eyes to himself. I thought the whole thing was ridiculous, but I couldn't ask him to give it up and bring everyone's wrath down on our heads. I managed to force a smile, just in time, because Draco had been shuffling impatiently, and now said, "I think you may well activate him, Krisomer."

Lillias clasped her arms and shivered. "Will he really come alive?"

"You'll see," said Krisomer, and with something of triumph in his look he turned to the checkered panel in the base of the Chronotome and touched his fingers in a flickering pattern on the squares.

He asked me later, "Why were you so worried and uneasy?"

I said, "I was thinking of what you had told us about him: a man from those tiny states on the Aegean Sea of the Mother-of-Worlds—a condemned criminal, you said, very grateful for whatever kind of extended life we might give him . . ." In the twenty-five thousand years

of Old-Civ there were many condemned criminals who became the Anointed and Enlightened of their people after their deaths: seminal minds, heroes of thought and action. A condemned criminal . . .

There was no sound, except as the air sucked in and caught swirling at the draperies of the seated man. His body jerked in a spasm, his arms and legs flung out, straining tendons, but slowly in great arcs as Krisomer controlled him, fingers catching at nothing, feet tensing in reflex, eyelids suddenly open with the startling black irises turning up and out and the blank remaining whites burning with crisscrosses of blood. Krisomer settled him gently, and he lay on the base of the machine, his clothes crumbled about him and his heavy flesh pressed against the metal.

"He's dead," said Magger flatly, and I had a very great desire to be elsewhere.

But he stirred and groaned, and lifting himself on his arms with great effort, sat up.

If you think you are different from us as you squat in a dripping cave, perhaps, wretched and hairy yourself,

listening to my voice with the Crystal pressed to your gritty forehead, you will see how far we had moved away from the men of those times. I think the others of my dekad were a little uncomfortable. What would he think of us, after all? The first crude inventions were thousands of years beyond his reach; he had not much more than fire and the wheel.

I recalled the one ancient man who had some faint inkling of what Omega Man was going to look like; wide as he missed the mark there was some search for us in the cracked paintings pictured on Museum scanners, the reaching attenuated men of Elgreco. He and this specimen were only two thousand years apart—but then I remembered that meant more than seventy-five generations for this gasping creature we were facing.

We stared at him, unable to speak. It was his first word that would unlock our hypnotized knowledge of his language. We waited breathlessly.

Propping himself, he stared around. His reddened eyes watered; he opened his lips and I saw that he had teeth; and he spoke his thick clicking ancient tongue:

"Apollodorus, are you here? . . . Simmias? Crito?"

My waking hours begin with emergence from stasis. The light outside is gold and never-ending; I make my own darkness. Sometimes it's as deep blue and green as the undersea worlds of Narkh and Pexxa, sometimes as dark red as the inside of the staphylic sac where I was nurtured, and sometimes as black as the nothingness beyond it.

I rise up to consciousness, curling and uncurling centered in the eight surfaces of the cell, half-dreaming with the colors around me. I call out light and lower to the floor; sandals bind themselves on my feet. There are blue-green crusty shells and stones I have fixed to the ceiling hexagon, and the light shines down through them; I found them on the sea worlds and put them there because they make something in this house that belongs to me only, and their abrasive touch scratches the itch of my boredom.

I pull tubes from the dining-wall and suck breakfast. The rest of the dekad are in stasis; my waking has disturbed their dreams—I can feel their restless turning—and there will be bitter complaints about me, but I'm not

particularly bothered about it, and when I go through the wall, I find the streetway under my feet.

I skim down the solid river on the living stuff of my sandals. The light is gold all around. It is a color I would be bored with if the sky didn't turn creamy from the gold and then mauve with curds of thickened cloud. Dekurions herd their very young dekads in pairs or triangular formations, chattering and tossing their gold or creamy heads as the light falls against them.

This particular time I made myself a spectacle by wearing Krisomer's clumsy draperies. Damn Krisomer! Between the stares and the prickling I finally took it off and dropped it on the streetway where it sank and dispersed through the Machine into the great storage vaults of matter. I knew he had made it in a synthesizer and no animal had ever grown its fibres, but the feeling was the same, a disgusting object and I was glad to be rid of it.

I found the old man on a couch in an alcove off the Specimen-Room, asleep. I supported myself on the air, reclining, and waited. Why had I come? I can only feel that a vanished instinct had awak-

ened and called me. I waited and remembered.

What had they all expected in the way of an entertainment, perhaps for him to gibber and squeak?

He had sat up more comfortably, and then said, "Am I dead? Is this the place where Gods are?"

"Gods!" exclaimed Krisomer. "We're men, sir, we've brought you here to another country."

His eyes moved from one to the other, till he had scoured us all.

"You're dressed the same, but you're not the kind of men I know. What is this place?"

He wasn't in the least afraid, and Krisomer began to stammer, but I said firmly, "Old man, this is *another place*, and if you expect to stay alive you had better accept it as you see it."

Draco shot me a look of pure horror, but the specimen merely moved so that his heavy veined legs hung down from the base of the Chronotome. He scratched in his beard and half-closed his eyes to make sure they were not mistaken. "Sir," he began, "—or madam, according to your dress, I neither expect nor want to stay alive."

I was so surprised that he couldn't tell the difference between men and women that I was speechless, but he went on: "I've already refused one offer of rescue, and I had not expected to be pestered by any others. But I haven't intended to be rude. Thank you for your intentions, and please take me back at once."

"That's impossible," Krisomer got his voice working at last. "That can't be done now."

The old man's brows drew together. "Sir, you had no right at all, whatever the reason, to—"

Krisomer held up his hands: "Sir, I must explain—"

But I hissed in our own language, "Krisomer, you'll drive him insane!" and Draco said quickly, "Go to sleep, old man." And he rested back quietly, on the Chronotome.

The women shrilled and nattered, and the men jeered; there was a good half hour of racket and recrimination, and the worst of it fell to Krisomer. I love Krisomer very dearly—better than the rest of the lot put together—but it didn't stop me from laughing my head off, and finally I said, "I think we Achaeans of Civ 4000 might as well go back to stasis."

So we went back to stasis.

But I was a little uncomfortable underneath, and I turned the thing over in my mind. Sir or madam indeed!

I leaned my elbow on a comfortable mound of something I couldn't see, and watched him. His thick-haired arms and legs twitched a little, occasionally; his chest rose and fell; his breath snorted from the peculiar formation of his mouth and gorge. His body plagued him with more ways of reacting to fear, his world gave him more things to be afraid of than I have hairs on my head, but he was not afraid.

So I watched him. And I thought that Krisomer ought to have started with a man from, say, Civ 250,000, for better results.

Old-Civ began to stir; his lips opened and his tongue moistened them. I did away with my invisible supports and sat crosslegged on the floor, hands on knees. He wakened with difficulty out of layers of sleep: Draco's command had been a deep one, out of anger and fear, and the sleep of the ancients had none of the awareness of stasis.

He turned his head and saw me with bleary eyes.

I said nothing.

NO END OF TIME

He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Do you always go naked?"

"Usually."

"Then I confess I am completely unable to distinguish you from any of the others. Are you one of the persons I saw—was it yesterday?"

"I am the person you addressed as Sir or Madam."

He grinned. "Then I apologize, my dear. Now I *will* know you from the others—by the look in your eye. That's the clue."

But I waited, and he watched me, speculating. He turned his head and looked at the rippling patterns on the walls, the dizzy swirl of the floors. Then he said, "You are expecting something from me. Is it awe or howling terror? I know people who have been amused at the spectacle of that kind of thing in others . . . I'm afraid to ask."

"I don't think you're afraid of anything."

"You say that because you see I'm not afraid of death."

"No," I said, "that's not the reason."

But I had no time to say anything else, because Krisomer burst in with an angry flap of draperies, stuttering with vexation. "Stealing my thunder, Ashael!"

"Be calm, Krisomer; you

haven't much thunder left to steal."

He scowled. "Damnation! Draco says it's no kind of an entertainment, and I can send him back anytime I like. Anytime I like. He doesn't know what's involved."

"What's involved?"

He stared at me as if I were one of his impaled specimen butterflies. Then he tore off his robe and was about to drop it on the floor when he remembered the man watching us so curiously, bewildered at our strange language; he changed his mind and tossed the thing into a cubicle where it presumably sank through the floor unseen.

"I thought you at least would understand. To bring him here I had to time the thing down to the minute. To send him back I'd have to time it to the split second. There's a difference. I thought while he was keeping everybody amused I'd have time to work on it, but—"

"You are an idiot, Krisomer. How long . . . ?"

"Oh, several months; maybe a year."

"And have him hanging around all that time? How much entertainment could you have expected to get out of him even if things went well? And why, the devil

couldn't you have thought it all out beforehand?"

"Oh—you know Draco and his perfect dekad. I wanted something . . ."

I had nothing to say to that, and he muttered, "Creche-time coming within the year. If this silly thing gets out I'll end up without a dekad of my own . . . and things may not go too well for the rest of you, either."

I said softly, "Did you want children so much, Krisomer?"

"Children! My career as a Specialist would be ruined! There'd be no place in society for me at all!"

Oh, I wouldn't judge him too harshly. If you think I was much more anxious to have ten perfect little Omegans clustering around me with their sticky little bodies and shrill nattering voices. Though I think I had some sympathy for those who wanted it.

Finally I said, "You tell Draco everything's attended to, and I'll see what I can do."

He looked at me sharply. "What do you expect to get out of all this?"

I sighed. "Krisomer, I have nothing to do, I'm not a Specialist. And I'm terribly

bored. Now go away, please, before we drive this poor man crazy. We needn't taunt him with the situation."

Just as Krisomer is Draco's pet, I'm Draco's problem. There's one of each in every dekad. I'm Draco's despair, rather, since I've never chosen a specialty—mainly because they all seem to me as vain and fritillary as Krisomer's butterflies. I'm not lazy: I've studied a little of everything in Omegga's hundred thousand artificial worlds and five hundred thousand years of recorded history. There's been talk of not letting me have my dekad on that account, and when Draco pleaded with me to name a specialty I told him I'd rather be a Universalist, and he cracked his knuckles and swore. But he would find some way of having the Great Dekad accept Universalism as a specialty if that was the only way he could help his perfect dekad to become parents.

Now, as I've said, I was bored; perhaps I had some vague idea of making a specialty of this Old-Civ specimen that nobody else seemed to want—unveiling it at the proper time to great gasps of awe and delight. At any rate, I was left regarding him

doubtfully, wondering how and where to hide him.

He said, quite calmly, "I judge you have sealed my fate."

I sat crosslegged on the floor again, in front of him, and put my hands on my knees.

"I have a very great deal to tell you," I said, "and none of it easy or pleasant. Do you want me to dress myself like the women of your country again, to make it less difficult?"

"Your body doesn't offend me," he said. "Go ahead."

I told him all of it finally, but not all at once. I had set him up in a terrarium in one of the specimen rooms; the place is so vast that there are rooms even Krisomer didn't know about, and most Specialists would rather do field-work than stay in the Museum; so that problem was solved for a while. I set up a force-screen and heated and moistened the room to a degree unbearable to us: Old-Civ Man could perspire to some extent but mainly he eliminated in ways consistent with the usual structure of the livebearer. I provided the furniture he asked for and described, and the food he said he needed; then I turned

off the floorstream within the force-field and sat like a cat on a mat made of layers of soft absorbent cloth—very peculiar and unpleasant—and talked to him till I thought his brain might burst and my mat was soaked with sweat and I was left gasping. I taught him our language while I was about it: I am not at my best trying to express myself in Aorist Intransitive conjugations. I made a night for him, too, a soft blue-purple night with stars hanging in it—but that was merely my own officiousness, for I doubt if it solaced him, the man who was ready to die.

"You are proud of your world."

"Of course. I'm bored with it, sometimes, but I wouldn't change it. Look, it's been two hundred and seventy-three years since the last crime, and I don't remember how long before that."

"Ah, but you have no vices."

"Vices?"

"Overindulgence in any physical pleasure, or delight in what moral men would consider evil or disgusting."

"Oh, not in the sense you mean. There's no sex and not many intense pleasures in the

body. There's a great deal of pleasure in all kinds of knowledge, and I suppose you could call it a kind of vice to become so engrossed in piddling details that any kind of large or universal view is completely lost."

"Tsk." He seemed disgusted, but whether at his lack or our plethora I couldn't tell.

"Anyway, it's almost impossible to commit a crime here."

"Krisomer?"

"Oh—Ashael! You gave me a horrible start. What are you doing here?"

"They've all been wondering why I've been putting in so much time at the Museum. An interest in the Chronotome is convenient. I'm just afraid Draco might have sent one of them to follow me. All the spy-eyes turned off?"

"Yes, but don't hang around. I've told them he was sent back; thank the Lord they didn't want to come around and watch. I wish I'd listened to you . . . what will it do to the fabric of Time? And now I've got to hurry over it, and keep the whole thing secret. It's quite a predicament."

"Ah, but it's an adventurous life we're leading, Krisomer."

He stood back from the

console and swabbed his wet forehead with his arm.

"Ashael! Do you realize I've already committed a crime?"

It is almost impossible to commit a crime in Omegga.

"When you say that you are not livebearers," said the old man, "you mean that you don't bear children inside your bodies."

"Yes. All babies come from the store of protoplasm in the creche. They're nurtured in groups of ten and a dekurion is assigned to each group, or dekad. We still produce boys and girls equally for the minute personality differences between the sexes, because they give some harmless variety. At birth-time every dekad is examined carefully and if there's one imperfect child the dekad is scrapped. There are standards of weight, shape, and measurement. If that happens, the future dekurion is out of luck, because there's only one chance—we can't expand forever—and of course the rest of his dekad feel uncomfortable about him, but that's how it is. Even if—even if a person commits a crime his whole dekad is looked into, and his dekurion's dekad, and in

some rare cases his grand-dekurion's, to see if the infection hasn't spread by precept, and the whole of the criminal's family in his generation may not be allowed to bring up children."

"That is why you all look so much alike."

"Yes. We feel we've found the perfect pattern."

"A dreadfully monotonous one. Your dekurion is the only person I've been able to tell apart."

At birth-time every dekad is examined carefully and if there's one imperfect child the dekad is scrapped.

Hadn't I said it myself? *He's not a bad dekurion . . . only a little shorter and thicker than the usual Omeggan.* At that moment, I stopped being bored with Omegga.

"Krisomer, I'm frightened."

"Why? It's slow work, but I haven't run across any difficulties."

"You've noticed Draco is shorter and stouter than the rest of us."

"Ssh! Who could avoid noticing? But you'd better not dare ever to bring it up. Put it out of your mind."

"Do you think he measured at birth?"

"Don't be silly. If he had-

n't he wouldn't be here. And neither would we."

My specimen was a man who asked questions. When he wanted to know what Justice was, I gave him our definition of it. When he wanted to know the limits of the Universe I showed him our model suspended in its transparent globe, the great pulsing and glittering knot of the Continuum. If I couldn't answer in my own words, I knew where to find an answer. So you mustn't think that his questions alone disturbed me. But even now I am at a loss to know why they began disastrous trains of thought . . .

It would be simple enough to go and have a talk with Draco.

Draco, why are you shaped differently from all other Omeggans?

I shuddered, not because I was afraid of Draco, but because I sensed for the first time how afraid Draco must be.

Out in the streetway warm patterns ran under my feet, swirling gold—and I was chilled. A terrible thought had occurred to me: *Draco had better not make trouble if he finds out what Krisomer and I have done, or else—Filthy, filthy!*

The street was the same, young dekads floating by, twittering with silvery voices in the gold air. Nothing changes in Omegga. At home there was my bare cell, and all the full hours I had spent talking to Krisomer or Draco seemed nothing. I turned back.

I came upon Krisomer in the passages between the Chronotome and the hiding-place.

"I was looking for you," he said, and added simply, "I'm finished."

"Completely? Now?"

"An hour or two. But I want to have a rest, so I'll be fresh."

"I'll have to tell him, then."

"Don't. We'll clear his memory."

Something in me revolted. "I couldn't do that."

"That's rather a foolish scruple, isn't it? But don't tell him anyway, in case something goes wrong." He stepped aside, and I saw a little creature scampering behind him.

"What's that? It looks familiar."

"A dog—oh, not a real one, a machine I made up." He flushed a little. "I was testing. I took one out of the

Chronotome and sent it back." And he added a little shyly, "I thought it would be nice to have around, so I made one."

Poor Krisomer. His hours with me had been less than perfect. I said on impulse, "May I borrow it?"

"Don't be silly, Ashael, take it. I can always make another."

I picked it up. It was warm and trembling, and its soft internal thudding felt like a living heart.

How relieved I should have been at this point, that it was all over and everything was going to be the same in this unchanging Omegga I loved in spite of the boredom of its perfection. There was a status quondam that must be restored. I wasn't going to kill the specimen, and it wasn't my responsibility if his barbarous people were going to do it. He was a criminal in their eyes. Yet he was an infant of seventy years out of the far reaches of time, and much more ignorant than a seventy-year-old Omeggan child. And still he had planted my mind with a fearful curiosity and budding flowers of love and hate. I had never needed the word *hate* before this time. And love?

He was lying on his couch, wrapped from head to foot in his thick robe. I dropped the dog and touched his shoulder, frightened, but he stirred and uncovered his face. I thought that this was the way he might have lain when he died, to preserve the decency of his body in the privacy of death.

"I was not sleeping," he said.

"You were wishing for home."

"Yes."

"And for death?"

"For the few minutes I would have been able to spend with my friends before I died."

He had the couch he was lying on, a stool, a small table, plumbing arrangements to keep himself clean, and the force-field to keep him comfortable; around all the great delicate structure of the machines I had built up to maintain it. And then he had me.

"We haven't been very kind to you," I said.

"You've been as kind as you know, I think." He sighed. "I've always believed that the further Man is able to go away from the needs of the body, the nearer he will be to the heavens . . . but in

Omegga, where flesh is nothing, you haven't yet been able to see the faces of the Gods. I don't care that the Earth isn't the center of everything, I believe what you tell me about the structure of the Universe, and I agree that your conception of Justice is probably perfect of its kind—but I wonder if your perfection is the only one possible, and if you might not have followed a different and better road to it. I still haven't found in your answers what I've been looking for all my life."

I was silent; I was thinking of Draco, and the lies and deceptions Krisomer and I had engaged in.

He noticed the dog, which had been standing head cocked, half curious and half afraid. "I didn't know you had dogs here."

I couldn't bear to tell him the thing was a machine, even so perfect a one that it was impossible to prove it was unreal without dissection. So I lied again. It's easier each time.

"Krisomer brought it out of the Chronotome."

I don't think Krisomer has any concept of nobility. His dog was a little scrawny black and white creature. But the old man lifted it to his

knee and stroked the spotted head.

"You are kind," he said, "but I blame you. It was only to see me squirm that you took me away from a place where I might have died with some dignity, among my friends."

I said painfully, "Sir, I think you will go back there very soon." And then I left him.

I could have let it finish perfectly, in character with Omegga. But I went looking for a few essential truths in the only place to find them, a small world across the Galaxy. To reach it means traveling through the Gates; it takes time and strong nerves. I am not a good traveler; after my atoms have been beamed through the dizzy voids I remember the black cold in my reassembled cells for hours. There are three relays on the way, and I was afraid to take the really necessary time to rest between them, because I wanted to be back when Krisomer sent the old man through the Chronotome. When I came out of the third one I was shivering and sick.

Omegga-Pharez is a world very much like my own at first appearance. But it is a

smaller one, a quieter one—there are no children—and the houses are single cells, not the staphyle-shaped apartments dekalians live in under the care of the dekurion, and as dekurions with dekads to care for. It is a world of grand-dekurions.

It's a paradox of Omega that it takes longer to travel through the streets from a Gate to a residence than it does to cross the Galaxy, and I felt no better after my long twisting glide towards the house I wanted.

I don't know why I took it for granted that she would still be alive, but I touched the door, and it dissolved and I found her in stasis: my grand-dekurion Ghimeter, three thousand years old.

She was floating centred in the room, a pale warm light around her. A body stripped to less than the essentials, I would have thought, a sine qua non of skin and bone with barely enough sinew to articulate the skeleton. She spun gently in the living light, a gryscope of black shadows of ribs, armpits, eye-sockets. The eyes had receded so far into the pits of her skull it was impossible to believe that she would be able to awaken and speak. But my presence in the room disturb-

ed her; she stretched out to her length and her eyes opened.

The light brightened and she came down to the floor and sat there with her legs crossed.

When she did speak her voice startled me because it was so strong. "Which one are you?"

"Ashael. Ashael of Omega-Hmerkion. Your grand—"

"I know." She raised a hand to indicate the dining-wall.

"No, thank you, I couldn't—" I felt myself dizzy and swaying. Her eyes widened. The irises had long bleached white, and the pupils were black vortices. "My dear! You are ill! You've come all the way from Hmerkion?"

I said apologetically, "I am not a good traveler, and there are three relays."

"Only to see me." There was a note of irony in her voice, but nothing to do with self-pity, wounded vanity, or loneliness. I don't know if I would be the same, but I have not known many people who, faced with a century of grand-dekalians, have not beat a happy retreat to a world of retirement after contributing a few wary pats on the head and a great many

of the most sincere good wishes. Ghimeter was no exception. I hadn't seen her for nearly five hundred years, hadn't wanted to, and didn't flatter myself that she missed me.

"I wanted to talk," I said. It was an inadequate statement. But she smiled.

"About Draco." At my visible start, she added, "I have been waiting—or perhaps only hoping—for this for a long time. It is a sad thing when you can look at your grand-dekalians and say to yourself that you have produced a hundred numbskulls. Now it may be that there are only ninety-nine."

I agreed with her at heart, but was rather shocked and flustered at her bald statement. "I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, I think you do. None of the others have ever come to ask me why Draco, who is obviously far from a perfect Omeggan, is enjoying the status usually given only to perfection."

I sat down. "Then why?"

"Do you know Omegga-Ymrenb?"

"Only the name."

She twisted about and pointed a finger at the wall behind her. It blackened and

the dull swirl of the Galaxy flared and brightened on it. "There's Hmerklon, there's Pharez,"—two red lights like marks flanking the thorax of a giant scorpion—"and there's Ymrenb." A lonely pinpoint at the tip of the longest arm. "Not very appealing, even from here, hey?" She turned again to face me and the wall greyed. "That is a world of exiles."

"Nobody is exiled in Omegga."

"No,—but people do exile themselves. No-one has to send them away."

"Ghimeter, I think I'll end up as your hundredth numbskull. I don't understand you."

She smiled. "You have known people who have not been allowed to keep a dekad."

"I have."

"Where are they now, down the street from you?"

"No, but they were never sent away. They just . . ."

"Yes. They just trailed off into nothing . . . because there was nothing else to do. It is uncomfortable to be of age and not have a dekad. Why? It's no-one's fault: an invisible flaw in the sac, a minute deficiency of nourishment. That is how evolution is run in Omegga, and it seems fair enough. Every deserving person is given a chance. One

chance." She turned back to the wall, as though to summon the map again, and changed her mind.

"When I recognized the signs that I was producing an imperfect dekad I visited Ymrenb to find out what I would be facing if I were forced to exile myself there or some other place like it. Oh, I imagine it started out as a world just like this one, and it could be as pleasant and comfortable. But the people who settle there, perfectly perfect Omeggans, come feeling beaten and ashamed, because Society has neatly excised them, trimmed them off as dead flesh.

"If a streetway stops the technicians who might have fixed it have forgotten or don't care; no one goes that way again because it's too much trouble to walk a few hundred steps. Temperatures change underneath and part of the surface buckles and breaks open: food and water ooze and the Machine begins to crumble. If you are forced to walk around the cracks and don't look down, because you are steeped in apathy and loneliness. Whole worlds have died that way; I've travelled, in the last thousand years, and seen them."

She stopped and moistened her lips. I pulled a tube from the wall and she drank. "I came back from that journey, and I told the trouble to my dekalians and my dekurion. They were a harder lot than your generation, I think. There was a little time left before the birth, and we used it: we searched through the archives for every bit of information about the Great Dekad, their dekurion, their dekads, and their grand dekalians; in documents, gossip, spy-eye recordings—don't ask how we got our hands on them—and we found enough. So, when it came time for the Great Dekad to inspect the babies . . . well, everyone has a measure of self-interest, and Hmerklon and Pharez are pleasant places and Ymrenb is not . . . and I got my dekad. But remember, you can't use any of this without breaking your own neck."

"I don't want to hurt anyone, Ghimeter."

"Perhaps not. But this is the only coin left in Omegga: If you want to sleep in Pharez with peace and honor you must raise your dekad and guard your perfection in whatever way comes to you. It's the only way of staying really alive."

So I knew. But I went

through the Gates again more dead than alive, and had no time for thinking. What would I say to the old man now, when it was the last time that I would see him? That Omegga was more striving and vigorous than ever he could have imagined, or that it was more corrupt and rotten than even his barbaric state must have been? There was not much comfort either way, and he would soon be terribly dead.

In the streets I had to cover my face with my hands, not to see the buildings going by, or I would have fallen.

I found him as I had left him, with the dog on his knees. I sat down near him. "Krisomer will be here soon, to—to send you back." To set you free, I had almost said. I was ashamed of Omegga then, of Ghimeter's advice, so evil and so vital. There was nothing more to say to him, really, but I felt I had to try. Before I could speak, he said, "You look tired and ill. It's not necessary to wait here with me."

"There's nothing wrong with me; I've only been on a long journey. I can't—" It was impossible to be casual; "—I hate the thought of sending you to your death . . .

there's still so many stars and worlds to see, so full—"

"You know that's nonsense." He smiled. "Don't you? The men and women of my world—well, I have helped them mark the boundaries of their ignorance. Could I stand at the corners of your streetways, even if I were in the shape of an Omeggan, and stop you people, and ask them questions? They're satisfied that everything is complete . . . not the weak human creatures I know and love. You would be punished for having hidden me, and I would ask a question too many and end in a prison here as well."

And I did not answer that we have no prisons in Omegga.

"My search is embedded in my own time. If I were able to live there I would keep it up until I did . . . but not here." He rested his hand on the dog's cleft head. "At least, my friend, in a universe where wonder is gone, I can still ask myself what goes on in your head?"

And the dog said, "No, Socrates; in this great land and time where every hand may pluck the fruits of knowledge, I have at last been accorded the gift of a tongue worthy to speak with a philosopher."

Oh, I was angry! At Krisomer for his foolishness, at myself for my lie. His grip on the dog tightened for a moment, but he set it down quite gently. The dog cowered before him, whining, "Don't hurt me, I didn't mean any harm."

"Poor creature," he said, "I don't mean to touch you."

Something in his voice made it bristle. "You have no right to despise me just because you are human." But it was not even a dog. Once it left the room where I had turned off the floorstream it would sink, like all other inorganic matter, into the Machine.

Krisomer came into the room. "Everything is ready now."

"Are there many people about?"

"No. There's a great crowd at an exhibition of Late Brehengg hypnoplays in the Twelfth Dynasty room." He added, smiling, "I arranged it."

A pity you couldn't have done that last time, Krisomer.

Coughing a little because of the suddenly dry air, the old man walked along the floorstream; it was only solid floor to him, because he didn't know how to manipulate it. We followed slowly after, like

the tall naked guards of an Egyptian king. I think for a moment I saw the people of Omegga as he must have seen us: ungainly and grotesque creatures with narrow cryptorchid bodies. His steps were even and his robe hung heavy as a column of fluted stone.

As he went up the two steps of the Chronotome I saw that the sores on his ankles had healed. It was all we had been able to do for him. He sat with crossed legs, rubbing the stiff joints of his knees, and watched us patiently. Krisomer reached for the panel. I don't know what word I was waiting for, but the old man only raised his hand in grave salutation and nodded once, and Krisomer pressed the squares.

Immediately his body was caught up in a terrible vortex and he spun sickeningly for a moment with outstretched arms. He gave a choked cry, but before we could reach him his body seemed suddenly to explode from within and he fell with his robe tangled around his feet. Krisomer and I cried out at once; I leaped the steps and bent over him, feeling for his heart. But it was still; his face was cyanosed and there were drops of blood at the corners of his

eyes and mouth. Even while I was watching, thin red threads began to flow from his ears and nostrils.

Krisomer's voice trembled. "What have I done?"

"He was too old, Krisomer." I had to straighten his limbs and cover his blued face with a fold of his clothing.

"Ashael, we must do something quickly!" I sat back on my heels and tried to think. From far down the halls there was a faint burst of laughter and applause.

"For God's sake, they'll be on us any moment!"

Finally I picked him up and climbed down from the dais.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get rid of him."

"But we have to—Ashael, you idiot, don't do it! What are you thinking of? You'll never be able to hide this!"

But I nudged him aside. The Omeggan baby is grown with inhibitions against killing in the genes of its primary cells. I had not killed, not in the legal sense, and there is no inhibition against disposing of a dead specimen. I took the body into a specimen room and flashfroze it. Then I cubed it in the dissector and put it into the dis-

posit. Hide? I wasn't trying to hide anything. I was still standing there with his clothes in my hands when Krisomer came with the others and took me away.

And we faced the Great Dekad: their names are, Maronen, Rhodis, Gerhan, Falx, Vazia, Paris, Mel, Kamo, Dordre. I record them for posterity, the noble sonorous names of absolutely perfect Omeggans. Whether they would succumb to Ghimeter's kind of investigation I don't know, and don't want to. They were and remain Olympian.

"But why, Ashael, *why* did you not reanimate the specimen?" Gerhan's face was creased in lines of anxiety. It was not often that he found something he didn't understand. "Panic, malice, spite?"

And I answered wearily, "I've been through the machines so many times—surely enough to give you the answer."

"But the answers you have given are not rational."

"Then, sir, I think we are speaking from different frames of reference."

I could have reanimated him back with the numbed and eroded brain of those who have borrowed back

their lives, to drink his cup in silence. For the friends who covered his face, the dignity might have been there. For him and me . . . "I blame you," he had said. And what would his values count for if he did not know and love them even in his darkening brain as he lay dying? I had done what seemed then and still seems perfectly reasonable and inevitable. And that was the end of it.

"Of course there is no doubt in our minds that neither of you is fit to raise children." I suppose I had expected that, but it was not easy to accept. "Besides bringing a specimen here under false pretenses when you were unable to send him back, and so were forced to keep him here unlawfully, you bungled his return, and in effect killed him. Then you destroyed the body. This is tampering with Time itself, and destroying a piece of History. He must be replaced before a terrible damage is done. Since you have kept measurements and recordings of the man, the protoplasm reserved for your children will be used to make a replica to be sent back and die in his place.

"You no longer have a position in Draco-of-Ghimeter's

dekad, but you are free. Justice is complete."

The replica will satisfy the perquisites of the monster Time. The act that cost me so much has sunk into the great machine Omegga and been made meaningless. But I was right, and my regrets are only for Draco and Krisomer.

I know Omegga will pass, like every other thing that's ever existed. So it doesn't seem too unreasonable that it might be a savage whose mind is crude, but new and fresh, who finds this Crystal all smeared and scratched while scrabbling in a cave, and presses it to his eyes to see the colored lights and discovers that it can speak to his mind as well. Holding the cool planes of the Crystal I tell my story here in the archives; faint echoes from endless galleries, and reverberations from huge vaults of records gather in and are recorded with my voice. Then I go along the floorstream and out along the streetway where the air is warm and the glittering patterns swirl underfoot, and the skies are mauve, gold, and creamy.

At home, Krisomer and I have only Draco to speak to, but those eight are no loss, and until we are pushed out,

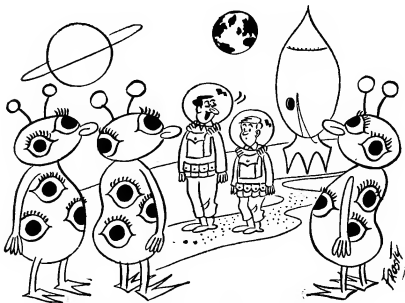
we will stay, sustained by bitter pride. And I eat, and I admire my spangled shells with the light coming through them; the silver knots untie from my feet and I drift and turn suspended in the thousand colors of stasis. Because nothing changes—not in a lifetime.

But sometimes when I have made it very dark around me I sense Krisomer nearby restlessly turning.

His arm thrashes out, his hand strikes and pierces the abutting wall and thrusts into my cell, a strange under-sea animal twisting in unconscious pain. I grasp it and pull him through, the wall closes, and we rest together, the length of our bodies touching in the rare human contact of Omegga.

There is nothing else to do in this world.

THE END



"When you grow up, I suggest you become an eye doctor."



According to you...

Dear Editor:

I just want to tell you that I have been reading your magazine *Fantastic*, as well as your companion magazine *Amazing*, for quite a while and I enjoy it very much. Now usually I don't write to any letter columns, as I know my letter will never be published anyway. In the past I have written many other letters to different letter columns, and none of them have been published as yet. But I decided to try just once more and hope that maybe this time my letter will see print, or at least the contents of my letter, even though you might not mention my name, or give the credit for the idea to someone else.

Well, in your February issue of *Fantastic* in the letter section one of your readers stated that it would be a good idea to have an anthology of the best stories from *Fantastic* and *Amazing* and I would like to say that I heartily agree with him. This would be a real good idea and of course your anthology would never be complete without two or three stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs which have been published in your magazine in the past.

Thomas McGeehan
405 E. 5th Street
Santa Ana, Calif.

• *The idea is still under consideration. We hope it will mature.*

Dear Editor:

In all my years of reading all and any type of science fiction, I have never read such a good story as the "Doomsday Army." (I have been an sf fan about twenty years.)

This story is simply and very ably written. My compliments to the author, Jack Sharkey.

Also my good sir, I never laughed so much as I did while I read this fine story. It's very typical of our army, civilian brass and the ordinary way of life of the same ordinary man.

Thank you very much for your time and trouble.

James M. Stripling

P.O. Box 426

Williamsburgh, Va.

• *No trouble. Lots of time, but no trouble. Glad you liked it.*

Dear Editor:

May I write a fan letter about one of your stories. It is in the March issue of *Fantastic Science Fiction Stories* and is called "When He Awakens" by Steven S. Gray.

It really held my attention and I feel the writer has a nice easy style of expressing himself. The ending was unusual too. Altogether very nice. Hope you can print more of his.

Janie Pahl

University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon

• *We hope so, too. What impressed us particularly was that this story represented a rare use of the Negro as a science fiction protagonist. There should be no segregation in space, either.*



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